

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Essays on
Ontology and Archetype



SAMUEL ZINNER

archegos

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and Archetype

Samuel Zinner



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PREFACE

This monograph explores in more metaphysical depth many of the topics treated previously in my book *The Abrahamic Religious Archetype: Essays on the Transcendent and Formal Relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.¹ Part I consists of comparative essays on Platonic and Neoplatonic understandings of epistemology and intellection. The first essay, “The Semiotics of Inliteration of the *Umm al-Kitab* and Sacred Time,” explores the dynamics of the descent of supra-formal revelation onto the plane of human prophetic intellection from the framework of semiotics theory, assessing to what degree semiotics might be helpful, or present an impediment to understanding sacred texts as sacred “signs.” The eternal Word pierces the veils of temporality through the mediation of a mode of the Neoscholastic concept of *aevum*, a “sacred” time participating in both the timeless and the temporal. Our essays identify parallels to Platonic philosophical concepts in Christian and Jewish scriptures, demonstrating a compatibility and “divine sanction” of the perennial aspects of Hellenistic philosophy, including the sometimes problematic concepts of the soul’s pre-existence as well as resurrection and transmigration, with special reference to the appearance of these doctrines in various schools of thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Our exploration of the Platonic doctrine of image and likeness, or archetype and form, incorporates logia from the *Gospel of Thomas* to explicate and illustrate the commonalities of the perennial philosophy in Platonism and Jewish metaphysical thought.

This study explores the theme of the celestial nature of Christ in connection with the interpenetration of the divine *Intellectus* and the created *ratio* as a way of understanding certain aspects of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, a theme

¹ Forthcoming, London: Archetype, 2011.

amplified in the chapter entitled, “Immanent *Intellectus* and Divine Self-Contemplativity,” which is in essence an exploration of the modes of knowing God according to Sufi, Christian Neoscholastic (Aquinas) and mystical authors (such as St. John of the Cross). We are further concerned with the explication of the Neoplatonic and Thomistic synthesis of *Esse* and *Ens*, a synthesis which can be fruitfully compared to the Hindu doctrine of the mutual relationship between Brahman and Maya as well as the metaphysical distinction between Beyond-Being and Being. The predominant Neoplatonic inspirations behind Aquinas’ thought are usually overlooked in standard scholarship. Part I concludes by returning to the theme of the descent of supra-formal revelation onto the plane of temporality and contingency; the concluding essay bears the title “Some Notes on the *Ruh* and the *Amr* – Spirit and Word” and maintains a metaphysical equivalence between the Qur’anic Mother of the Book and the figure of the celestial Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures, and additionally presents the case for a grammatical as well as metaphysical correspondence between the Arabic word *Amr* and its Aramaic cognate, *Memra*, which in turn is roughly equivalent with the Greek term *Logos*.

Part II concentrates on Christian metaphysics, emphasizing ‘Isa (Jesus) and the Virgin Maryam (Mary). Our essay “The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm” analyzes the temporal and supra-temporal aspects of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, the descent of the Spirit on Pentecost, and the second coming of Christ; all these realities represent formal unfoldings of a single timeless reality; in this way, some of the apparent chronological anomalies in the Gospels may be explained, and various theological tensions within Christian theology may be resolved to a certain extent, as well as tensions existing between Christian and Islamic doctrine. The essay also stresses the specifically Marian mode of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Our chapter bearing the title “On the Possibility of the Multiplicity of Logos Incarnations: Denotative Christic and Connotative Marian Reflections Based on Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, Tertia Pars, 3, Articles 5, 7, and 8” is an in-depth presentation and assessment of Aquinas’ teachings on the multiplicity of Logos manifestations and of the possibility

of incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and how these issues relate to the Islamic understandings of Muhammad as Paraclete and Frithjof Schuon's esoteric understanding of the Virgin Mary as a manifestation of the celestial Holy Spirit on the earthly plane. The essay also explores works by Aquinas other than the *Summa* wherein the angelic doctor affirms the possibility of multiple Logos incarnations. In regard to this essay, as well as others, we gratefully acknowledge the insights and comments of Dr. Michael Ewbank, though the conclusions drawn are naturally our own. An essay entitled "The Christic Aspects of Ascent and Descent" explores Qur'an sura *Al-Ma'idah* ("The Table"), and presents the themes of the ascent of 'Isa to heaven and the descent of the table of celestial bread which 'Isa bestows upon the world. The chapter "The Prophetic Essence of the Virgin Maryam in Qur'anic Context" specifies the prophetic status of Maryam in Islam and describes the essence her prophethood, a prophethood further clarified in the next chapter, "Silence and Night," which emphasizes the Virgin's role not as legislator but as manifestation of the divine Matrix, not of Word, but of divine Silence and Peace. Three essays on Maryam conclude Part II, "The Virgin Maryam and the Divine Mercy"; "Sura 97, the Night of *Qadr*"; and "Sura *ar-Rahman* as Maryaman Sura." These pieces present Maryam as a manifestation of the divine Mercy, indicating a Maryaman essence within the Qur'an as a whole. Significantly, sura 97 (*al-Qadr*) contains a simultaneous dual application to the descent of the Qur'an on the Night of *Qadr* and the descent of the Logos to the world through Maryam on the night of the Nativity.

Part III is introduced with the title *Ahlul Bayt* (integrating both Shi'ite and Sunnite views on the "Household of the Prophet") and surveys and critiques a rich variety of themes encountered in Shi'ite metaphysical traditions. This section begins with a chapter bearing the title "Reflections on the Shia-Sunni Divide"; here we survey Frithjof Schuon's major thesis on this division as reflecting legitimate realities emanating from Islam's founder. We contextualize Schuon's criticisms of both Sufi voluntaristic mysticism and Shi'ite "exo-esoterism" and compare the Islamic "schism" to Christianity's Protestant-Catholic divide. Schuon's observations on the latter divide, as well as on

the distinctives and convergences of the traditional religions in general also serve to contextualize his enlightened assessment of the Shia-Sunni divide. In the end, both the Sunnite and Shi'ite schools are orthodox, yet also both stand in need of rectifying certain disequilibria in various domains of belief and praxis at the extrinsic level. The chapter "The Light Verse with Reference to Muhammad, Fatima, Jesus, and Mary" reviews Shi'ite perspectives on sacred persons as earthly manifestations of celestial light, but we include Jesus and Mary in our considerations and thus enlarge the paradigm, highlighting correspondences especially between Fatima and Mary as earthly theophanies of celestial Wisdom and Mother of the Book. Our chapter "The *Ahlul Bayt* and Qur'anic Esoteric Veils" examines to what extent allegorical and anagogical exegesis of the Qur'an might be justified, and we present various allegorical interpretations of Qur'anic *ayat* relating to the themes of light and Paradise pertaining to Fatima and 'Ali as examples of legitimate spiritual or esoteric exegesis. "The Esoteric Kingdom of Prophecy and the House of Wisdom" interprets a famous *hadith* on 'Ali as the gate of wisdom and presents aspects of 'Ali reminiscent of Maryam and 'Isa. The essay also compares the Arabic traditions on the *Afrad* with the "unitary" or "solitary ones" of the *Gospel of Thomas*. "The *Ahlul Bayt* and the Divine Names" gathers Shi'ite speculations on theosophical etymology. "Aspects of Fatima and Maryam in Sura *al-Qadr*" researches in greater detail the dual allusion to the Qur'an's descent and the Logos' descent to Maryam. The concluding essay, "Sura *Al-Kahf*: The Story of *Al-Khidr* and Moses," presents the relationship between exoteric and esoteric wisdom, emphasizing the feminine nature of esoteric wisdom with the examples of both Fatima and Maryam, metaphysically equating the Qur'anic Mother of the Book with the Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures. The feminine Divine is the embodiment or theophany of the divine Mercy and Compassion, and this theme we have sought to incorporate and explicate in our work based upon legitimate traditions. We seek refuge in the All-Merciful and the All-Compassionate, and God knows best...

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Casablanca, Morocco

PART I



COMPARATIVE ESSAYS ON PLATONIC INTELECTION

1. The Semiotics of Inliteration of the *Umm al-Kitab* and Sacred Time Dilation

According to Christian theology, the Word, the Logos, undergoes incarnation by being united in perfect unity with human nature. For Islam, the Word (*Kalima, Amr*),¹ undergoes not incarnation, but inliteration by being perfectly united not with human nature, but with human language, in this specific instance, Arabic. The divine uncreated Word descends in order to be inliterated in the created words of Arabic. Judaism also knows of such a sacred reality, namely, the inliteration of the preexistent Torah in the temporal, earthly Torah of Moses. In the Jewish scriptures, preexistent *Hokhmah*, Lady Wisdom, which coincides with the preexistent Torah, descends to the world in order to “tabernacle” within and to dwell among humanity in hypostatic and “inliterated” modes.²

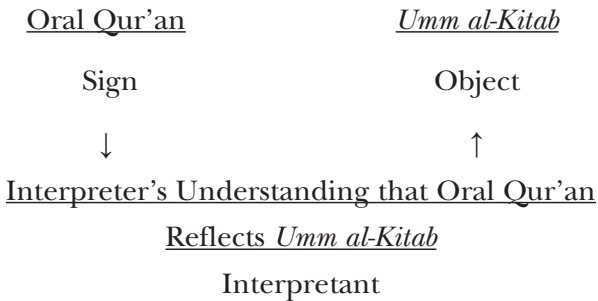
The divine descent of the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Mother of the Book, took place upon the night of *al-Qadr*, which is “better than a thousand months” (sura *al-Qadr* 3). The descent of the eternal Word into time must relativize time so that one night equals

¹ Arabic *Amr*, although usually translated as “command,” is the equivalent of the cognate Aramaic word *Memra*, “Word,” used in a divine “hypostatic” sense in the Jewish targumim. In Hebrew and Arabic the semantic field of the concept of ‘word’ contains the aspect of ‘command’.

² The following verses from the Jewish scriptures on Lady Wisdom treat of her descent to the world of humanity. *Wisdom* 7:27: “And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh the friends of God and prophets.” *Sirach* 24:13: “And he said to me: Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thy inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect.” *Baruch* 3:38: “Afterwards she was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.” These traditional Jewish concepts relating to Lady Wisdom are applied to the masculine Logos in *John* 1:14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among [literally, ‘tabernacled in’] us, and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

more than a thousand months. In other words, the descent of the eternal into time involves not ordinary secular, historical time, but “sacred” time, a mode of *tempus* allowing humans who hear the word in temporality to participate in the eternal and divine realities.

Yet the concept of inliteration, valid insofar or inasmuch as it accords with the symbolism of the preexistent Book, is somewhat incomplete, given that the original manifestation of the Qur’an is oral rather than written. The latter belongs as to origin not to a written, “literate” mode, but is rather a “spoken” reality in the domain of language and speech. Since the Qur’an describes itself repeatedly as a “sign,” or *aya*, and since each verse is called an *aya*-sign, we might be able to find a helpful descriptive label for the Qur’an in the field of semiotics. More fundamental than the Qur’an as an example of inliteration is the oral Qur’an as semiosis. Of the semiotic sign classes, (isomorphic) icon, index, and symbol (the latter constituted through social convention or agreement), index is the class which in a theological manner most fittingly parallels the entry of the formless archetypal Word into manifestation as formal words. We could then refer to the oral manifestation of the Qur’an as the “indexation” of the *Umm al-Kitab*. The semiotic model of indexicality is the class that most appropriately approximates the supra-ontological and ontological continuity between the Word and words, or Idea and articulation, or yet again, between the conceptual and the sonic. The triadic-subject semiotic schema involved in this instance may be represented as follows:



The anti-closure dynamic of interpretant reflective infinity, that is, the process by which an act of interpretation gives rise to an unending series of interpretative reflections, *in potentia* at least, explains the hermeneutically inexhaustible depths of all sacred texts and authentically transcendent “literary” works. The Neoplatonic philosophers’ recognition of the Homeric poetic corpus’ sacred status is therefore justified from this perspective in light of the *Odyssey*’s and *Iliad*’s resistance to plenary or exhaustive exegesis.³

A word is a sonic corpus; prior to the oral Qur’an is the unspoken, unarticulated Qur’an, the “thought” Qur’an, in the mind of the Prophet. This communication of the *Umm al-Kitab* to the mind of the Prophet naturally involves a central cognitive mystery and raises the question of the relations between thought and articulation in speech, which relates to the field of psycholinguistics. The many schools of interpretation within psycholinguistics demonstrate that profane science is far from solving the mysteries of thought and language production. Theologically the dynamics of the descent of the *Umm al-Kitab* are left at the level of mystery in the *al-Qadr* sura. Ultimately the descent of the Word is beyond explanation, remaining on the formal plane a sacred mystery.

In psycholinguistics, sense-based knowledge, that is, knowledge gained by experience, is called declarative knowledge. Yet as the “rationalist” school of linguistics argues, there must be a supra-sensorial base or ground of knowledge by which the human mind interprets this sensorial input. In philosophy, theology, and metaphysics this supra-sensorial foundation could be termed “transcendent.” The problematic involved here is not as crassly simplistic as suggested by the older notions of a supposed oppositional polarity between Aristotelian sense-based knowledge and Platonic preexistent archetypal knowledge. Scholarship in general has insufficiently emphasized in this context that Aristotle’s theory of connatural, pre-conceptual knowledge

³ On the sacred dimensions of the Homeric corpus, see Algis Uždavinys, “From Homer to the Glorious Qur’an: Hermeneutical Strategies in the Hellenic and Islamic Traditions” in *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, vol. 11 (2003), 79-111.

overlaps with Plato's concept of a priori knowledge, especially when Plato's language is taken for what it is, namely, a richly variegated mixture of allegory, metaphor, and analogy. There must be a supra-sensorial mechanism by which sensorial input is processed, and as psycholinguists theorize, this processing dynamic must involve some level and some sort of autonomy and automaticity.

Certain theological models would explain the transcendent dimension of the human mind as the presence in human consciousness of the divine "Spirit." And it is fitting in this model that according to both the Qur'anic and Gospel narratives, the Word is conveyed to humanity by the "Spirit," which is to say that it is none other than God who bestows the Eternal Word upon humanity in temporality. But the Word that shares in temporality remains the Eternal Word, even though clothed in created words; and by virtue of the fact that in the process of "incarnation" or "inliteration" the continuity between the Eternal Word and temporalized words is not severed, the "time" in which the Eternal Word appears cannot be "ordinary" time, but must be sacred time, somewhat along the lines of the Scholastic notion of the *aeuum*. This sacred dimension or mode of time, this non-ordinary aspect of time, is denoted by the *al-Qadr* sura in the following line: "This Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months." "Better" must involve, in this context, both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, both the qualitative "spiritual" or sacred time, and quantitative time dilation, analogically understood.

When the eternal "encounters" the temporal something akin to time dilation must occur, and perhaps it is this dynamic which might help explain the concept of realized eschatology. *John* 5:25: "Amen, amen I say unto you, that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." To reformulate this sacred saying: "The end of the world is coming and now is." This teaching on realized eschatology is even more forcefully advanced in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* logion 51: "His disciples said to him: 'When will the day come when the dead will rest? And on what day will the new cosmos come?' He said this to them: 'What you are looking for has already come, but you do not see it.'"

Eternity is, or at least entails, the absence of time, whereas in realized eschatology all time tenses and their absence (which is to say their simultaneous coexistence) are involved. These imply eternity per se and mediated or participated eternity. Both must apply to the contingent order, since pure unmediated eternity is applicable only to the Divine as *Ipsum Esse*. In the contingent order, eternity per se must always accompany or be manifested in the mode of a participated eternity.

“The end is coming and now is”; the “already” and “not yet” coexist, all time tenses are “simultaneously” present. This is reminiscent of time dilation wherein two temporal trajectories coexist, in separative mode at the local levels of the moving and (relatively) stationary objects respectively, yet in unitive mode when viewed against the backdrop of the cosmos as a whole, in which matrix both moving and stationary objects are entified.

Sacred time dilation: “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years” (see Qur’an 32:5; *Psalm* 90:4); “A day the measure of which is as fifty thousand years” (Qur’an 70:4). These divine sayings principally involve the Lord of revelation (“Being,” or Hindu *Ishvarah*), since the *Ipsum Esse* (understood as the Platonic and Eastern Orthodox “Beyond-Being,” equivalent to the Upanishadic *Nirguna-Brahman*) has no “day,” dwelling as It does in strict eternity.

It is by the divine Spirit that we transcend time and realize our presence in the Eternal Now, the “Day” of God, which is essentially timeless. The Holy Spirit is thus the Eternal Spirit, or the Spirit of Eternity, the divine power by whose means Jesus and all the Prophets spoke by inspiration:

O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember my favor unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission, and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how thou didst raise the dead, by My permission. . . . (sura 5:110).

On the eternal Day of Doom, the Spirit and angels ascend unto God, indicating that over aeons of time the ascent to salvation is accomplished through the Spirit and the angels, who will speak by divine leave on the Day of Judgment: "On the Day when the angels and the Spirit stand arrayed, they speak not, saving him whom the Beneficent alloweth and who speaketh right" (sura 73:38). On the Day of Judgment, the Spirit and angels ascend to God: "The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him" (sura 70:4); on the Night of Revelation, they descend to the world, in order to bring creation upwards in ascent to God: "The angels and the Spirit descend therein by leave of their Lord with the Word in all its fullness" (sura 97:4). The world is integrated into the Spirit, in whom creation will ascend to the One on the Day of Judgment. Peace and restoration reign in the Night of contingency, of suffering, and of redemption, until the dawn of the Eternal Day breaks in revelation.

Enlightenment is effected by the Spirit of God's Word of command, the Spirit of revelation—the revelation of attaining eternal beatitude through surrender:

They will ask thee concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is of the Word (*Amr*) of my Lord, the knowledge of which ye have been vouchsafed little (sura 17:85).

The Exalter of Ranks, the Lord of the Throne. He casteth the Spirit of His Word (*Amr*) upon whom He will of His slaves, that He may warn of the Day of Meeting (sura 40:15).

And thus have We inspired in thee a Spirit of Our Word (*Amr*) . Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a Light whereby We guide whom We will of our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path. The path of Allah, unto Whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Do not all things reach Allah at last? (sura 42:52-53).

"All things reach God at last," on the final day, the Day of Judgment, the Eternal Day, which is to say, the Eternal Now.

Eternity seems far to us, but to God it is near: “. . . the doom . . . from Allah, Lord of the Ascending Stairways [whereby] the angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years. But be patient with a patience fair to see. Lo! they behold it afar off while we behold it nigh” (sura 70:1-4). God is the beginning and the end; the end is present in the eternal Now. Through the teaching of Prophetic truth, conveyed by the Spirit, the Eternal Day is realized in the consciousness of humanity. “Say: The Holy Spirit hath revealed it from thy Lord with Truth, that it may confirm those who believe, and as a guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered” (sura 16:102).

Eternity is now; eternity ever is. The “reintegration” of contingent consciousness into the Divine Intellect brings to the human intellect transcendence of time. Those who discover the hidden truths will not taste death (see the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 1), because for them there is through transcendence an “escape” from time, in whose domain death holds sway, but in whose overcoming limitless Life is found.

2. Implicit Platonic Principles in Sacred Scripture

Three Speculative Essays

ESSAY I

Platonic Themes in the *Book of Wisdom*

Preexistence of the Soul and Mediate (Delayed) Animation

Book of Wisdom 8:20: “And whereas I was more good, I came to a body undefiled.”

Wisdom 8:20 would seem to imply or presuppose both preexistence of the soul and mediate (delayed) animation. Moreover, the preexistence of the soul implies as a correlate the “re-existence” of the soul, known variously in the traditions as the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, and resurrection, the three being but variations on a single theme. All three terms are symbols which refer to post mortem or eschatological realities, and both these states lie outside the temporal and spatial orders of existence, though these states and orders are certainly related in some mode of continuity. As a consequence, the post mortem and eschatological states can be described only symbolically, metaphorically, and analogically, which is to say, only indirectly, allusively, and elusively.

Divine Archetypes

Book of Wisdom 9:8: “And hast commanded me to build a temple on thy holy mount, and an altar in the city of thy dwelling place, a resemblance of thy holy tabernacle, which thou hast prepared from the beginning.”

Letter to the Hebrews 8:2, 5: “the true tabernacle, which the Lord hath pitched, and not man . . . who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things. As it was answered to Moses, when he was to finish the tabernacle: See (saith he) that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shown thee on the mount.”

Plato’s doctrine of the divine archetypes is transparently compatible with the *Book of Wisdom* and the *Letter to the Hebrews*, both of which teach that the earthly Temple is but a shadow of the “heavenly realities,” the scriptural phrase for Plato’s celestial preexistent divine archetypes. Therefore the scriptures endorse the traditional theosophical dictum, “As above, so below; as below, so above.”

Anthropological Dualism of Body and Soul

Book of Wisdom 9:15: “For the corruptible body is a load on the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind that museth upon many things.”

It is by now a cliché among modern biblical scholars that the Hellenistic anthropological dualism of body and spirit, or soul and body, stands in contradiction to the biblical, Semitic view of the human as psycho-somatic unity. Plato’s dualism is spurned as disjunctive, while biblical anthropology (as if there were not several) is designated as holistic. But the opposition thus erected between Hellenistic and Semitic anthropologies as a reputed absolute contradiction is upon further reflection revealed as a somewhat shallow posture. Through dialectical reasoning, one can transcend these opposites and unveil a synthesis which exposes the areas of mutual overlap, as well as their distinctive and legitimate contrastive emphases. Plato stresses the immortality of the soul, whereas the Hebrew scriptures stress the resurrection of the body. Yet the Jewish scriptures also know of immortal and disembodied souls, such as the familiar “shades” who dwell in *sheol*. Furthermore, Plato’s concept of the immortal soul is related to the idea of reincarnation, and in light

of the common etymology overlapping the terms resurrection of the flesh and “re-in-carnation,” the immortality of the soul also stands in relation to resurrection.

In order to understand Platonic anthropological dualism properly, one must first appreciate the divine Philosopher’s concept of matter. Plato and those who followed him, especially Plotinus, developed a distinction between two types of matter, which we can elucidate by means of the following contrastive list:

The Two Kinds of Matter

substantial	functional
fine	gross
<i>pneuma</i>	<i>soma/sarx</i>
intelligible	sensible
active	passive
divine/celestial	contingent
simplex	complex
incorporeal	corporeal
changeless	changing
undifferentiated	differentiated
polymorphous unity	multiplicity

Moreover, Plotinus observes concerning matter and the divine archetypes: “Both are engendered, in the sense that they have had a beginning, but unengendered in that this beginning is not in time: They have a derived being but by an eternal derivation” (*Enneads* II:4:5; Stephen MacKenna, B. S. Page translation). In *Enneads* II:4:16, Plotinus explains that matter is a non-existent existent, a privation of specific character, indeed an utter privation. In the same passage the great interpreter of Plato writes on the two kinds of matter: “The Matter in the Intellectual Realm is an Existent, for there is nothing previous to it except the Beyond-Existence; but what precedes the Matter of this sphere is Existence, by its alienism in regard to the beauty and good of Existence, Matter is therefore a non-existent.” For Plotinus, matter is not evil per se, but it is evil in a merely relational sense with reference to the soul. Furthermore, when

a Platonist says that matter is evil, the word evil has quite a different meaning than when used in ordinary Christian terminology. *Enneads* I:8:12 illustrates this point: "To deny Evil a place among realities is necessarily to do away with the Good as well, and even to deny the existence of anything desirable. . . . Evil is not alone; by virtue of the nature of Good, the power of Good, it is not Evil only: it appears, necessarily, bound around with bonds of beauty, like some captive bound in fetters of gold. . . ." This is reminiscent of the rabbinical description of the sex drive as a manifestation of the *yetser hara*, the "evil" inclination in human nature, which though called "evil" is in actuality good, for without it, there would be no perpetuation of the human species, as the ancient rabbis were fond of reminding their audiences. Therefore, both Plotinus and the rabbis employ the word "evil," in this context at least, in quite a different sense than do Christian theologians who denounce Hellenistic anthropological dualism.

According to Plotinus, *Enneads* IV:5:1, the soul's descent into matter is but a misdirected desire for the good. The emphasis is on the good, not the misdirection, so that for Plotinus matter cannot be intrinsically "evil" in the usual Christian sense. *Enneads* I:2:1: "Since Evil is here 'haunting this world by necessary law,' and it is the Soul's design to escape from Evil, we must escape hence. But what is this escape? 'In attaining Likeness to God', we read. And this is explained as 'becoming just and holy, living by Wisdom.'" The symbol of the soul transcending matter is functionally equivalent to the scriptural symbols of holistic salvation. *Genesis* 1 proclaims all creation is good; yet the Bible also speaks of evil in the cosmos. Plato and Plotinus speak of the demiurge as good and beneficent, and Plotinus vigorously combated the idea of an evil demiurge as proposed by some Gnostics. So Hellenism and the Bible are not at all that far apart on the question of evil and matter. Finally, that physicality cannot be unconditionally positive in every aspect, anyone can recognize who has been plagued by any of the multitude of privations of the good which afflict humanity.

Father of the World as Creative Demiurge

Book of Wisdom 10:1: “She [Wisdom] preserved him who was the father of the world [Adam], that was first formed by God, when he was created alone . . .”

For Plato and the Neoplatonists, the title “father of the world” denotes the demiurge. In *Wisdom* 10:1, Adam is designated the demiurge, the father of the world. Divine Wisdom preserves him from sin. In Philonic terms, this is the sinless, spiritual Adam, not the earthly Adam (the spiritual Adam is the celestial Adam known as the *Adam Kadmon* in Kabbalism). The demiurge for Plato is the divine creator, fashioner of the cosmos out of preexistent formless matter by contemplation of the eternal archetypes of the divine Mind—though the demiurge is also equated with the divine Mind. The demiurge is in a sense both created and uncreated.

Creation from Preexistent Formless Matter

Book of Wisdom 11:18: “For thy almighty hand, which made the world of formless matter . . .”

Paul’s various statements that all things are from, in, and through God, such as *Romans* 11:36, *quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso omnia ipsi gloria in saecula amen*, indicate that emanationism overlaps with the biblical doctrine of creation. In *Genesis* 1:2, the abyss, chaos (formlessness), is watery, so that we may say here that *aqua prima materia est*. Both *creatio ex nihilo* and emanation ultimately stress that the cosmos has its origin in and from God. Furthermore, in this context, consider the creationist term “from nothing” and the emanationist term “in God.” Both prepositions “from” and “in” must be understood equally as metaphors; neither can be “spatially literal.” From yet another angle of vision, emanation represents the eternal *consilium* of the divine Mind regarding the “emergence” of the cosmic manifestation; creation represents the concrete manifestation of the cosmos in temporality *sensu stricto*. The *in Deo* of emana-

tion “precedes” the *ex Deo* of creation. The prepositions *in* and *ex* denote respectively the divine immanence and transcendence in relation to the cosmos. Emanation unveils the eternity of the world, whereas creation unveils its temporality; and the two must be related in some mode of qualitative continuity. Consider also that the doctrines of emanation and creation co-exist in the Upanishads, just as they do in scripture: *Genesis* 1:2 and *Wisdom* 11:18 teach a chaotic, formless, or void *prima materia*, while *2 Maccabees* seems at least to suggest *creatio ex nihilo*, though the language there is possibly ambiguous. Inasmuch as Platonic philosophy stresses that even an eternal cosmos would require an engendering and an Emanator, this model is in accord with the essence of the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine.

* * *

In utilizing the Platonic concepts of the preexistence of the soul, the dualism of body and soul, the demiurge, the celestial archetypes, and the preexistent formless matter, sacred scripture endorses the perennial Platonic principles of philosophy. The latter must therefore be essentially compatible with biblical doctrine and Christian theology in the areas of ensoulment, anthropology, and the various aspects of creation, namely, demiurge as corresponding to Logos; formless matter corresponding to *creatio ex nihilo* (for inasmuch as the nothingness out of which God creates is a primordial, atemporal, non-local reality, this nothingness must be a “positive” reality merely symbolized by the negative denomination of the void); and celestial archetypes corresponding to the divine eternal *consilium*.

ESSAY II

Pre-existence and Re-existence

There is a mosque whose foundation
Was laid from the first day
On piety.
It is more worthy
Of thy standing forth (for prayer)
Therein. In it are men who
Love to be purified; and God
Loveth those who make themselves pure.

Sura 9:108

The historical sense, the literal interpretation of this Qur'anic passage is clarified sufficiently in the traditional commentaries. But in this brief meditation we are interested in an anagogical interpretation and sense. According to such a viewpoint, the aya refers to the preexistent heavenly mosque composed of the preexistent souls of humanity predestined for purity. This heavenly mosque, its "foundation was laid from the first day," that is, from the foundation of the world, on the first day of creation. It is founded upon piety, or as M. A. S. Abdel Haleem renders this Qur'anic Arabic term, "consciousness of God."¹ The predestined souls "stand forth" therein—that is, they emerge into existence within the heavenly mosque. They emerge forth therein upon the "first day" of creation. These are the "brothers of the purity," who realize that the Spirit of God works in all the traditional religions, within peoples of every nation, creed, and throughout all space and time.

The Christian parallel to the idea of the archetypal mosque is found in the earliest ecclesiastical homily preserved, known

¹ *The Qur'an*. A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

as 2 *Clement* 14:1-5. There we read of the preexistent heavenly church:

The first Church . . . is spiritual, which was created before the sun and the moon. . . . And the Books and the Apostles plainly declare that the Church existeth not now for the first time, but hath been from the beginning; for she was spiritual, as our Jesus also was spiritual, but was manifested in the last days that She might save us. Now the Church, being spiritual, was manifested in the flesh of Christ. . . . No man can declare or tell those things which the Lord hath prepared for His elect.

Similarly, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision II, we read: "The Church was created before all things; therefore is she aged; and for her sake the world was framed." The Clementine paradigm, which contrasts the protological and eschatological manifestations of the Church, is reminiscent of those passages found in the *Gospel of Thomas* which treat of the theme of preexistence. It is certainly no coincidence that the first sayings of the Thomas gospel on this theme are introduced by a saying (logion 17) also alluded to in the Clement passage quoted above. *Thomas* 17 is also paralleled in an Islamic *Hadith Qudsi* (Divine *Hadith*). Here we give *Thomas* 17-19:

17: Jesus said this: I will give you what eye has not seen, what has not been heard, and what hand has not touched, and what has not entered into the human mind.

18: The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us how our end will be. Jesus said: Have you discovered the beginning so that you may enquire about the end? For where the beginning is, from there will the end come forth. Blessed is he who will stand² in the beginning, for he will know the end, and he will not partake of death.

² Compare this with those who "stand" in the celestial mosque of "the first day" (= the beginning) in sura 9:108. See also the description of the three "inner" apostles James, Peter, and John as "standing ones" in *Mark* 9:1, *Galatians* 2:9,

19: Jesus said this: Blessed is he who existed from the beginning, before he existed. If you come to exist as my disciples and if you will hear my words, these stones will be your slaves, for to you belong five trees in paradise which stay green in summer and winter, and their leaves do not fall. He who will know them will not taste of death.

Related to this constellation of sayings is logion 84 of the same gospel:

Jesus said this: You rejoice on those days when you behold your likeness; but when you look upon your images which came into existence before you did, which do not die, and which are not revealed, how much will you be able to bear?

Among the Abrahamic religions it is indeed surprising that both Judaism and Islam hold to a belief in preexistence of the soul as normative, whereas the Church, which was influenced far more by Platonic philosophy, has traditionally censured the belief. The theological issue may of course be resolved even in the Church, for the matter all depends on the particular sense given to the term preexistence. For example, the easiest resolution of the problem, from a classical Christian standpoint, is to interpret the term preexistence in the sense of divine predestination, or at least divine foreknowledge, of those souls which would, in time, come to constitute the Ecclesia. The question, ultimately, is one of determining precisely which *mode* of existence is to be assigned to the term preexistence. This is clear from Jesus' intentionally paradoxical sounding phraseology in *Thomas* 19: "Blessed is he who existed . . . before he existed." Obviously two different (yet related) modes of existence are involved in this saying, otherwise, depending on how we interpret the logion, we would be left with an odd sort of

etc. as explicated by David Wenham and A. D. A. Moses, " 'There Are Some Standing Here. . . . ' Did They Become the 'Reputed Pillars' of the Jerusalem Church? Some Reflections on Mark 9:1, Galatians 2:9 and the Transfiguration," *Novum Testamentum* 36, 2 (1994), 146-63. Lastly, we refer the reader to Muhammad ibn al-Hasan an-Niffari's *Book of Standings* (*Kitab al-Mawaqif*).

tautology, pleonasm, or a blatantly nonsensical contradiction. The meaning of this paradigm, or one of the possible meanings, is: Blessed is he who was with God in eternity (or, in the eternal Mind) before being born in time. Or as *John* 1:1, 14 reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . and the Word was made flesh and tabernacled within us." Indeed, the words of *Thomas* 19 are applied by the church fathers (beginning with St. Irenaeus in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*) to the specific case of the preexistence and incarnation of the Logos. As Jesus was united with the Logos, but is not simply or simplistically identifiable in his humanity with the Logos, so that we can say in agreement with Aquinas that Jesus is not the Logos exhaustively, but is rather united with the Logos, so each righteous soul analogously exists with God from the beginning, but certainly not in the same mode as that which commences with birth on the earthly plane.

When speaking of preexistence, we are discussing an eternal or atemporal rather than a temporal reality. Here the categories of *tempus* and *locus* do not apply. But the necessary limitations of human language are already obvious in the temporal prefix of the very term preexistence, for eternity is not unending time, but rather non-time. Furthermore, just as no eschatological language can be understood in a literal sense, so all protological discourse (concerning, e.g., creation, emanation, preexistence, etc.) must be understood in a symbolic sense. Once we realize that pre-natal/birth and post mortem realities can only be discussed in symbolical, analogical, or metaphorical categories, senses, and modes, then we are immediately empowered to resolve most, if not in essence all, of the various theological "contradictions" relating to the various religions' theologies of pre- and after-life. Both emergence and departure of the soul "occur" in atemporal modes, and this explains much of the irresolvable problem of identifying precisely in a "scientific" sense when human life begins and ends.

Similarly, we may understand neither resurrection nor reincarnation in a literal sense. If both doctrines symbolically explain the same post mortem reality, then at the level of essentiality and intention there is no real contradiction between the two. And this is why transmigration is never explicitly attacked

in Abrahamic scriptures, just as the Hindu scriptures never attack the concept of resurrection. The etymological sense of the very word reincarnation agrees in essence with the doctrine of bodily resurrection, namely, a re-animation of the flesh ("flesh" denoting here the entirety of the person). And if on one level the doctrine of reincarnation presents certain logical difficulties, then certainly so does the classical understanding of resurrection, especially from a Peripatetic viewpoint. For if the "soul" cannot exist apart from the body, then once the body ceases to exist, an entirely new body would have to be created for a resurrection to take place. And this would necessitate the creation of an entirely new soul, given the dynamic and inseparable unity of a human as psycho-somatic entification. The Qur'an, in calling the resurrected body a "new creation," recognizes that in essence the resurrection of the body involves not a "re-gathering" of the body ("body" denotes in this instance the whole person) in the eschaton, but rather the creation of an entirely new reality. Any other view would seem to entail an implicit belief in resurrection as a mere resuscitation, a return to the mundane mode of existence. Resurrection life is a higher mode, a transfigured state of existence. This is precisely what St. Paul argues when he states that the natural body is raised a spiritual, that is, "supernatural," body. The Pauline "dichotomy" of flesh-spirit is not that of *corpus* and *spiritus*, but of the natural and supernatural, or human and divine, modes of existence. An over-literalistic understanding of bodily resurrection would be as absurd as an over-literalistic understanding of reincarnation. Even Plato's statements on preexistence of the soul are to be understood symbolically rather than literally, as well as atemporally rather than temporally. Plato was forced to employ allegories to describe the ultimately indescribable reality under discussion.

It is well known that in the Hebrew scriptures there is no concept of the possibility of a "disembodied soul." Similarly, in traditional Nordic thought, for one to talk to the dead, the corpse of the desired person had to be raised, for according to the ancient Germanic mentality there is no soul without a body. But if there is no earthly soul apart from the body, there is a "divine" element that both preexists and survives bodily existence—

namely, the *spirit*.³ And here we can avoid much confusion and misunderstanding by recognizing that when many people use the word soul they are actually referring not to the “natural” soul, but to the “divine” spirit. By preexistence of the soul, we really mean preexistence of the spirit. And the spirit has both created and uncreated aspects, or modes of manifestation.⁴

In Hinduism, the idea of reincarnation is considered a relative, not an absolute description of reality, as explained by Shankara. From the Vedanta perspective, ultimately only One Spirit exists, so that reincarnation cannot involve different or separate spirits (or souls) entering different or separate bodies. Reincarnation therefore explains reality from a merely relative, not an absolute standpoint. This view does not actually deny the existence of separate human identities in the contingent order, but it does recognize that the contingent order is not the Absolute. In other words, the created is not the Uncreated, though the two are related in some way, either as creature to Creator, or as emanation to Emanator; and both perspectives, creationist and emanationist, have their representatives in Hindu theology and scriptures. This line of continuity, or relation, between the unmanifest and manifestation, or manifest beings, is what makes

³ When one says “soul,” this often actually refers to the sensible soul. While calling the spirit “divine,” one could clarify, remaining within the pre-established analogical parameters delineated above, that the spirit can be said to be “preexistent” because it is, according to Meister Eckhart *aliquid increatum et increabile*, in virtue of the eternal Holy Spirit’s immanent presence. The formulation may be highly elliptical, but it is “on the mark” in more than one important respect. To describe the spirit as “divine” would in the Hebrew biblical ambient overlap somewhat with the term “immaterial.” Were one to describe the spirit as “supernatural,” one would have to keep in mind that just as transcendence and immanence can be seen on a line of continuity, so “natural” and “supernatural” must be “linked” at some point. The terms “supernaturally natural” and “naturally supernatural” would express, at least in a limited manner, this continuity.

⁴ The spirit preexists because it is uncreated. But the spirit is also created when viewed from the mode of entification, which is to say when the Intellect is “incarnated” in the human body. In this paradigm, both the preexistent archetype and incarnated form of the Intellect dwells simultaneously and “inseparably” in the human being. Intellect here is used as a synonym of spirit, basing our reflections on Plotinus’ language concerning the pure Intellect.

valid the Scholastic doctrine of the Analogy of Being, which can also be understood as the gradation of being, different modes of being, which implies ontic or ontological differentiation integrated into “simultaneous” continuity. The classic Sufi doctrine of the Oneness or Unity of Being expresses the same idea as the analogy of being. From one view, the relative is as Nothingness compared with the Absolute; this is the negative formulation. The positive articulation of this relationship is that since the relative and the Absolute are in some sense related (as creature to Creator, for instance), then even relative, contingent being/s participate in Absolute Being, and therefore cannot be spurned as absolutely unreal in itself/themselves. This continuity between being and Being is related to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of the soul’s deification. Non-being participates in Being Itself, for being mirrors, that is, reflects Being. In classical theological language, *creatio ex nihilo*. And the bridge between Non-being and Being is, in the Abrahamic theologies, the word of command, “Be!” spoken by the divine Word—in Greek, the *Logos*, in Arabic *Kalima* or *Amr*, in Aramaic *Memra*. The same mediating attribute holds true even if we view the cosmos as emanation “rather than” creation. Ultimately emanation and creation involve matters of semantic emphases rather than essential or total contradictions. The Hebrew scriptures support both views. 2 *Maccabees* 7:28 seems to contain the earliest mention of *creatio ex nihilo*, whereas the *Book of Wisdom* 11:18 explicitly states—in harmony with *Genesis* 1:1-2—that God made the cosmos from a preexistent, primordial “formless matter.” But though the formulations diverge somewhat, the underlying intention remains the same. Lastly, the general opinion of scholars is that the *Book of Wisdom* presupposes and teaches the Platonic doctrine of the soul’s preexistence. Since the Church holds the *Book of Wisdom* to be canonical, the doctrine of preexistence could never be absolutely condemned as false in every possible sense.

ESSAY III

Image and Likeness

Genesis 1:26-27 teaches that God made humanity in the divine “image” and “likeness.” Thus when we encounter in the *Gospel of Thomas* teachings of Jesus concerning “images” and “likenesses,” we are fully within the realm of biblical, Jewish thought. The influence of Neoplatonic thought need not be assumed. On the other hand, it is known that Platonic philosophy had already been incorporated into Jewish thought in Israel before the birth of Jesus. The *Book of Wisdom* is a canonical, divine approbation of the perennial Platonic principles of philosophy.

Gospel of Thomas 83 and 84 contain this scripture’s pronouncements upon image and likeness. These two logia are extremely challenging to translate, given the ambiguity of their Coptic (originally Greek) pronouns:

83 Jesus said this: The images are revealed to the man, yet the light in the images is hidden in the image of the father’s light. He will be revealed, yet his image will be concealed by his light.

84 Jesus said this: You rejoice on those days when you behold your likeness; but when you look upon your images which came into existence before you did, which do not die, and which are not revealed, how much will you be able to bear?

That these two logia bear a reference to the *Genesis* narrative of creation concerning Adam, i.e., humanity, is confirmed by the mention of Adam’s creation in the immediately following logion, no. 85: “Jesus said this: Adam came into existence from the Great Power and the Great Wealth, but he was not worthy of you, for otherwise he would never have tasted death.”

Logia 83 and 84 contain the notion that every revelation implies a residual concealment. This is to say that every statement uttered by God or humanity involves a certain incompleteness. Dogmas are adequate but not complete expressions of the underlying truths to which they refer and point. In cognitive

terms, in every statement there inheres polyvalence, indeed, even what we have called “transvalence.” Every Word has its concomitant Silence, and vice versa of course. The divine light—light standing here for “revelation”—when entering into the contingent realm by nature of its unfolding into the contingent order, implies a partial (even though adequate) revelation. If, as in *Thomas* 83 and 84, humanity is itself the divine image, i.e., the embodied revelation of the Divine, this would imply that humanity is simultaneously the revelation and obscuration of the Divine, which is to say that there is no simple identity between the Divine and the human. Yet this human limitation itself mirrors the divine reality inasmuch as no revelation of the Divine to the contingent order, no self-communication of the Divine in the world, can imply plenitude under every aspect. This mirrors the situation of the Absoluteness of the Divine Essence, yet the simultaneous relativity involved in any reflection and discourse upon that Essence.

Logion 84’s preexistent images, which are never manifest, must, according to the present hermeneutical paradigm, bear reference to the aspects of Revelation which remain uncommunicated, remaining in the Divine Silence and Obscurity. By means of reflection upon mental phantasmata created by the Revelation, human intellection must then transcend the limitative phantasmata. Yet in transcending these, one is really only in a certain sense encountering more “simple,” “natural” phantasmata. What we are dealing with here is a shift from discursive thought to contemplative intuiting. Intuition, or better, pure intellection, is analogically a quasi-angelic non-discursive mode of thought, and is a perception that is “simple” (unitary, “atemporally” simultaneous) as opposed to “complex” (separative, temporally sequenced).

archegos

3. Truth and Person in Islam and Christianity

Frithjof Schuon observes that whereas Christianity stresses love, Islam by contrast stresses truth, or in another formulation, which essentially amounts to the same dynamic, in Christianity truth is of a personal nature, that is, truth does not appear apart from the person of Christ, whereas in Islam truth is of an intellectual or reasoned order and nature.¹ These contrasts, valid as they are, naturally have to do, as Schuon remarks, with respective accentuations, and not with a multiplicity of absolute distinctions. This is demonstrated on the Islamic side by the fact that in the Qur'an, truth repeatedly appears as inseparable from the reality of person. Consider the three following ayat:

Sura 2:119: Lo! We have sent thee (Muhammad) with the Truth.

Sura 3:95: Say: Allah speaketh Truth.

Sura 7:43: Verily the messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth.

These passages reveal a Qur'anic paradigm, according to which truth is associated with either the Divine Person, God, or with the persons of the divine Messengers. Conversely, that in Christianity theology can be just as rational or reasoned as it is in Islam is demonstrated by both religions exhibiting throughout their histories mystical theologies as well as so-called Scholastic systematizations.

¹ See Frithjof Schuon's essay, "Truth and Presence," in *Form and Substance in the Religions* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2002), 1-11.

Qur'anically considered, ultimately God is Truth, and so truth is essentially personal in Islam: "That is because God, He is the Truth" (sura 22:6). By contrast, the Qur'an more than once denominates Islam in its principal sense, namely, submission to God, as the "Religion of Truth" (sura 9:33; 61:9), insisting that this Religion is "above all religion" (sura 48:28). This clearly means that true Religion in its essence cannot be identified in a limitatively exclusivist sense with any particular religion in the form of a sociological, historical entity, which would apply even to the sociologically manifest religion of Islam. This point agrees with the general spirit and theology of revelation in the Qur'an, namely, that God has revealed a single revelation in varying forms to the world throughout all nations and in all times; sura 5:48:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scriptures with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie with one another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ.

See also sura 22:67: "And to each nation have we appointed sacred rites and ceremonies." In other words, the Truth vouchsafed to Muhammad does not essentially differ from the Truth taught by Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, or the rest of the 124,000 world prophets (313 of whom were religion founding Messengers) spoken of in Islamic Shi'ite tradition.

The concept of Truth present in the Qur'an is naturally multifaceted; truth is associated with right doctrine, right beliefs, with reality, in the sense of agreement of thoughts and phenomena with divine or contingent reality. But there is also the identification of Truth with God. In this plenary sense, Truth is considered as it is in Itself, that is, as supraformal Truth, com-

plete Truth. The plenitude of Truth stands in contrast to truths, which are necessarily always incomplete (though not necessarily inadequate), and which therefore can never be identified with the Truth as such. The limited, partial nature of truths is indicated in a number of suras; 5:84, for instance, speaks of “that which hath come unto us of the Truth,” suggesting that “a part” of the total Truth has been communicated to the faithful.

The Qur’an also identifies the Truth with the divine *Kalima* or *Amr*, the *Logos*, by and in which God creates the cosmos: “He it is who created the heavens and the earth *in Truth*. In the day when He saith: ‘Be!’ it is. *His Word is the Truth*” (sura 6:73). Similarly, though less explicitly, sura 14:19: “Hast thou not seen that God hath created the heavens and the earth with Truth? If He will, he can remove and bring in some new creation.”² Consider also sura 15:85: “We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with Truth.”

The Christian “personal” approach to Truth is expressed especially in *John* 14:16: “Jesus saith to him: ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one cometh to the Father, but by me.’” Christ declares to his generation that God has chosen him as the Messenger, and that he is therefore the chosen way to God. In himself is found the plenitude of Truth, though insofar as his created humanity is concerned this Truth is not to be equated simplistically with Jesus, but rather with the Divine whom he represents. Complementing *John* 14:6’s constellation of “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” is sura 33:4: “But God saith the Truth and He showeth the Way.” In a similar tone, sura 34:6 declares: “Those who have been given knowledge see that what is revealed unto thee from the Lord is the Truth and leadeth unto the Way of the Mighty, the Owner of Praise.” The path, the way, is here the path to God, to union with the Divine. This is the very same way referred to in sura 1: “Show us the straight Way,” in agreement with Christ’s saying in *Matthew* 7:14: “How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life.”

² The latter verse is of course pertinent to the philosophical question of the possibility of many, or “alternate” worlds, or simply the more basic question of ontology and possibility.

That the Truth, Life, and Way cannot be identified simply with Jesus Christ is self-evident, for all manifestation implies form and therefore limitation, and every human manifestation or epiphany of the divine is necessarily contingent in certain aspects. The descent of the divine Logos as person or as Book necessitates participation in contingency and limitation, in finitude, and therefore in “imperfection.” Christ “is” the Truth under the aspect of his celestial nature, not according to his human nature considered in isolation, which is to say that God as *Ipsum Esse* is alone the supraformal Truth, and that, as Christ insisted, God alone is good, that is, God is the only essential Goodness. “And Jesus said to him, Why callest thou me good? None is good but one, that is God” (*Mark* 10:18); “And Jesus said to him: Why dost thou call me good? None is good but God alone” (*Luke* 18:19); “Why asketh thou me concerning good? One is good, God” (*Matthew* 19:17).

That the Truth is manifested and embodied by other sacred persons other than Jesus Christ is demonstrated by the Hebrew scriptures. *Sirach* 24:24-25, in the Latin Vulgate version has Lady Wisdom declare of herself: “I am the Mother of fair Love, and of Fear, and of Knowledge, and of holy Hope. In me is *all* grace of the Way and the Truth, in me is *all* hope of life and of virtue” (*ego mater pulchrae dilectionis et timoris et agnitionis et sanctae spei in me gratia omnis vitae et veritatis in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis*). The liturgies of the west and east imply that this Lady Wisdom on the earthly plane is the Virgin Mary. *Sirach* clearly denominates her, like Christ, as an embodiment of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The *Sirach* verses imply that Lady Wisdom is the very plenitude of the divine virtues and that she is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In ancient Jewish Christianity, that is, the original Jerusalem church headed by James the Just, Jesus’ “brother,” the Holy Spirit was thought of as the celestial Mother. Ultimately, Lady Wisdom is but a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who on the earthly plane manifests herself within the economy of the Christian revelation as the source and guarantor of the virtuous wisdom of the Virgin Mary.

According to sura 16:102, the Holy Spirit sends down the Word from God with the Truth: “Say: The Holy Spirit hath sent

it [the Qur'an] down from thy Lord with the Truth." This is reinforced by sura 17:105: "With the Truth have We sent it down, and with the Truth hath it descended." The Truth is sent down by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. This brings us to those three sayings in the *Gospel of John* in which Christ speaks of the Spirit of Truth. We have, in the translation below, changed the appropriate pronouns to reflect the fact that Christ, speaking either Aramaic or Hebrew, would have used the feminine pronoun when referring to the Spirit, since "Spirit" in both these Semitic languages is grammatically, conceptually, and theologically feminine:

John 14:17: The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth her not, nor knoweth her. But you shall know her; because she shall abide with you and shall be in you.

John 15:26: But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father, she shall give testimony of me.

John 16:13: But when she, the Spirit of Truth, is come, she will teach you all Truth. For she shall not speak of herself: but what things soever she shall hear, she shall speak. And the things that are to come, she shall show you.

This is the same Spirit of Truth whose earthly manifestation in the Christian economy of salvation coincides with the Virgin Mary, though of course not in an exclusive or exhaustive sense, for just as Jesus and the Word cannot be simplistically identified, so neither can Mary be identical with the Spirit *sensu stricto*. We see from *John 16:13* that Jesus was not able, for providential reasons and naturally not out of any spiritual defect pertaining to his Prophetic mission, to impart the plenitude of Truth to the world, but that the Spirit of Truth shall be able to do precisely that. If there is implied in these verses a certain disassociation between the Spirit of Truth and the Truth itself (for it is said of the Spirit of Truth that "she shall not speak of herself"), this perspective is adjusted in another Johannine passage, namely, *I*

John 5:6. The original Greek can be translated straightforwardly as: "And it is the Spirit which testifieth, for the Spirit is Truth." Later theologians, sensing a conflict here with *John* 16:13, "corrected" the text to read: "And it is the Spirit which testifieth that Christ is the Truth." The revision reflects a theological verity, but certainly so does the inspired original wording. The coexistence of *John* 16:13 and *1 John* 5:6 must mean that the "sub-ordination" of the Spirit to Christ is profoundly attenuated and relative. For ultimately both Christ and the Spirit constitute the Truth. Yet even in the "sub-ordinating" passages in *John* 14-16, Christ himself "sub-ordinates" himself to the Spirit, clearly declaring that the Spirit will be able to do what he was not able to accomplish, namely, the impartation to humanity of the plenary Truth, "all Truth."

Lest it be overlooked, we should point out the similarity between Christ's teaching that the Spirit would speak not of herself, that she would not glorify herself, but would only speak of Christ and glorify him, and the traditional Catholic theological dictum that Mary does not glorify herself, but only her son. And yet the son glorifies and praises his mother. Indeed, Lady Wisdom, according to *Sirach* 24:1ff "praises herself in the full church of the saints." And the Virgin proclaims in the *magnificat*: "All generations shall call me blessed"—this means that praise of the Virgin shall exist in every age. Mary and Jesus are in a sense equally blessed, as the Lucan rosary prayer establishes: "Blessed art thou and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Compare Jesus' words in sura 19:31: "'And (God) hath made me blessed wheresoever I may be'"; and continuing in aya 33: "'And peace be upon me the day whereon I was born, and the day whereon I shall die, and the day whereon I shall be raised to life.' This was Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word of Truth concerning whom they doubt."³ Jesus says this, note well,

³ It generally goes unnoticed that *qawla al-haqqi*, "Word of Truth," is a Christological title in Qur'an 19:33. The Word of Truth here is a person whom unbelievers doubt, not an impersonal discourse which unbelievers doubt. The most common dual Islamic Christological title is "The Word and Spirit of God"; God's Word is the Truth, so that it makes eminent theological sense to call Christ the Word of Truth.

with reference to his relation with his mother, as the immediately preceding aya 32 reveals: "And (God) hath made me dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest." If "grace and truth" came by Jesus Christ (*John* 1:17), Mary is the very plenitude of grace, "full of grace" (*gratia plena*), and manifests herself in a certain sense as the Spirit of Truth on the earthly plane.

That among the senses of *John* 14-16's "Spirit of Truth" is a prophetic reference to Muhammad as Ahmad, the Glorified One, is affirmed by traditional Islamic theology. This, however, does not present any contradiction to the interpretation of the Marian manifestation of the Spirit of Truth. For Mary, according to Islamic mystical theology, is the Mother of all Prophets. Muhammad as Prophet is therefore the spiritual son of the Merciful Mary as Mother of the Prophets. The Muhammadan and Marian dimensions of *John* 14-16 are therefore complementary, and are not contradictory, inasmuch as these realities interpenetrate each other.

According to the Marian interpretation of *John* 14-16, Christ promises that he will return to the world as the Spirit,⁴ as the Marian Spirit, to bring the plenitude of Truth. The Spirit descended on Pentecost day according to Luke's *Book of Acts*. But the same book specifies that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was among those gathered together in prayer on Pentecost. Mary was abiding with the saints, fulfilling *John* 14:17: "She shall abide with you and shall be in [among] you." The same Johannine verse explains that the Spirit of Truth will not be seen by the world. It is therefore intriguing and fitting that after Pentecost, Mary is never again mentioned in the Christian sacred scriptures in relation to the earthly sphere. She disappears from the terrestrial scene altogether; for she has become one with the unseen Spirit of Truth, watching over and teaching, imparting to humanity the plenitude of Truth.

All nations were gathered together in Jerusalem on Pentecost day according to Luke. In agreement with this fact, the Qur'an teaches that Mary became a sign to all creatures, to

⁴ See *John* 14:18-19 and 16:13-22, where Pentecost and eschatological Parousia coincide.

the entire universe in fact, which naturally encompasses all nations.⁵ Mary disappears from scripture before Pentecost, that is, between *Acts* 1:14 and *Acts* 2:1ff. Where did she go? Sura 23:50 suggests to us, in an anagogical sense at least, that she was transferred to Paradise: “And We appointed the son of Mary, and his mother, for a sign and We prepared an abode for them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs.” From the present perspective, this refers not to the beginning of Christ’s life, to his birth, but to the ending of both Christ’s and Mary’s presence on earth. They were transferred to a place of peace and flowing streams—reminiscent of the central Qur’anic symbol of Paradise—described in earthly terms to be sure, but Paradise nonetheless.

In the Christian scriptures, after disappearing from the earthly scene in *Acts* 1:14, the Virgin Mary next appears—whether directly or indirectly is beside the point in this context—in *Apocalypse* chapter 12:1: “And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun.” We have here two intriguing parallels to sura 23:50—Mary as a sign, and her dwelling in an exalted spiritual *locus*.

Apocalypse 12 has been the subject of much debate as well as richly variegated theological speculation. The scene of the Woman’s struggle with the infernal dragon has been interpreted protologically (with reference to the primordial fall of the “angels”), historically (as an account of the Virgin Mary suffering persecution by Roman authorities, a specifically Islamic tradition), and eschatologically (referring to the final struggle of the saints under antichrist). All three interpretations may be perfectly legitimate and complimentary, even when explicitly

⁵ As one of the *ulu al-‘azm*, law-bringing Prophets, Jesus, though his mission was historically restricted to his own people of Israel, being the Messiah he must have a universal theological significance. Thus he and his mother constitute “a revelation *for the worlds* and a mercy from Us” (sura 19:21) and “a sign” (sura 23:50). Given the essential relatedness between a “revelation” (unveiling) and a “sign,” the “sign,” mentioned in sura 23:50, which Jesus and Mary are, must therefore be meant not merely for Israel alone, but like the universal revelation that Jesus and Mary are, the Marian-Christic “sign” must also therefore be “for the worlds,” and not for one nation or people only.

referred to Mary under her varying primordial, historical, and apocalyptic dimensions. For example, the preexistent Lady Wisdom of *Proverbs* 8 and *Sirach* 24, viewed with proleptic reference to the Virgin Mary, allows us to envision a primordial presence of Mary in *Apocalypse* 12's account of the protological fall of the "angels."

Finally, *Apocalypse* 12 contains a further parallel to the Qur'anic account of Mary. According to sura 19:22-23, Mary cried out in pain and anguish when it came time to deliver Jesus: "And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: Oh, would I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten!" Compare *Apocalypse* 12:2: "And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered."⁶ The nature of the pain alluded to in sura 19 and *Apocalypse* 12, however, was not exclusively physical in origination, but was spiritual in nature as well. The very name Maryam (Mary) signifies in Hebrew, "bitterness." Maryam bears the name Bitterness, for she and her son through their Message turned the bitterness of life into sweetness.⁷

Lastly we point out that in *Exodus* 15, Moses' sister, the prophetess Miriam (Maryam, Mary), sings a prophetic canticle (verses 20-21), after which Moses leads his people to the waters of Mara (etymologically related to the name Maryam), signifying the waters of bitterness (verses 22-23). In verse 25, Moses casts a tree into the waters, turning them into sweetness (verse 25). Allegorically this refers to the Immaculate Conception, which sweetened and overcame the bitter waters of sin. Recalling sura 19's association of the virgin birth of Christ with the image of

⁶ *John* 16:21, which appears to refer to the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, employs language that seems to allude to the Virgin Mary: "A woman, when she is in labor, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." The Johannine thematic points of contact in this verse with *Apocalypse* 12:2 and sura 19:22-23 are noteworthy.

⁷ Similarly, the Buddha's mother is said to have been named Maya (Illusion) because she embodied the very absence of all illusion.

a palm tree, we end by observing that *Exodus* 15 concludes as follows in verse 27: “And the children of Israel came into Elim, where there were twelve fountains of water, and seventy palm trees: and they encamped by the waters.”

4. Of Archetype and Form: Three Metaphysical Investigations

ESSAY I

Esoteric Considerations on the Concept of the “Integral Qur’an”

To deal with the issue of the Holy Imams’ doctrine of the Integral Qur’an from an historical perspective lies beyond our intentions in these reflections. As far as the historical dimensions of the question are concerned, we will mention only that according to certain traditions, the Holy Imams taught that the Qur’an as received in ecstasy, or in the state of inspiration, by the Prophet “differs” from the Vulgate version of the Qur’an. The ecstatic, or Integral Qur’an as it is called, was taken by the Mahdi with him into his Great Occultation, and when he is revealed (= *parousia*) at the end of the world, he will bring back with him the Integral Qur’an.

Many misunderstandings can be avoided if we bear in mind that although the Mahdi participates in history by virtue of his parents and his birth, nevertheless, in his essence he is an eschatological entity. Traditions from Ibn Babuayy al-Saduq accordingly state that the Mahdi’s body is made of light, and his luminosity will be transparent after his *parousia*, or unveiling.¹ Insofar as the Mahdi’s coming will be an eschatological event associated with the Integral Qur’an’s return, we can state that the Qur’an possesses an eschatological dimension. But the Integral Qur’an, like the Mahdi himself, presently lies hidden from human view by providential veils. In contrast to the eschatological Qur’an is

¹ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism. The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Tr. by David Streight (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994), 116, 222 note 627.

the protological Qur'an, which refers to the archetypal *Umm al-Kitab* ("Mother of the Book") at the "transitional" level between the historical plane and eternity ("before" creation), which we will call analogically alpha (α) eternity. The *Umm al-Kitab* in α eternity is the preexistent celestial Qur'an, the formless, archetypal, supra-verbal Logos, which manifests itself on the terrestrial plane as the historical Qur'an.

Whenever an archetype is manifested on the formal plane, such manifestation by its very nature implies limitation² on account of the necessary complexity or diversity implied in every form, in contrast to the "simplex" or unitive nature of the divine archetypes. The result of this process is that the historical Qur'an is as a divine revelation simultaneously adequate—as adequate as possible on the plane of entification—and bounded by the limitative fields of finitude. That is to say, the Qur'an is the formless, eternal, uncreated Word of God inliterated in the formal, created, limited, and thus finite, words of humanity. Given that the Mahdi will usher the world into an eschatological state of being, the Qur'an he brings is the eschatological transfigured manifestation of the *Umm al-Kitab*. This is to say that he enables humanity to see the *Umm al-Kitab* transparently through the transfigured forms of the historical Qur'an. We are therefore speaking of what the Sufis have called *kafsh*, inward unveiling.

We will here propose two schemata to assist in illustrating the operative paradigms involved in these reflections. In the first schema, we propose a vocabulary in which the traditional terminology relating to formal and archetypal distinctions is made more fluid in its reciprocal boundaries. This is justified by the fact that the line of continuity between archetype and form can never be completely severed. The central underlying thesis

² This dynamic also explains why the human Messengers of the divine Light can never in every sense be "plenary" manifestations of God's attributes; or as Thomas Aquinas informs us with reference to Jesus, the created human nature of Christ cannot exhaustively embrace the uncreated eternal Logos (see S. T. 3 q. 7, a. 3). As Frithjof Schuon explains: "[N]o Divine manifestation can involve the Divine Spirit in itself and in its intrinsic totality, otherwise the Spirit would henceforth be in the manifestation in question, and no longer in God." Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*. Tr. by P. N. Townsend (Lahore, Pakistan: Suhail Academy, 1999), 94.

is that forms may be called “formal archetypes,” or formalized archetypes, given the “substantiating” continuity between the unmanifest and the manifest. The ultimate implication of this paradigm is that archetypes and forms are but two aspects of a single reality, rather than two absolutely separate or distinct entities. Similar to the subject-object dichotomy which is transcended in mystical states of unitive consciousness, the eschatological consciousness transcends and unifies, to a certain degree, the archetype-form “opposition.” Just as a person changes with age, so the archetype is “transformed” by its “passage” through the protological, historical, and eschatological “periods” of cosmic existence. We qualify “periods” because while the protological and eschatological participate in temporality, they are principally atemporal states by virtue of their ontological “nearness” to the α and ω eternity states respectively. That is, they are “nearer” to the supra-temporal than to the historical; by their nature they open out onto the eternal, whereas they are related to temporality principally by virtue of the oppositional force of what in Upanishadic cosmology would be termed the gravitas of the guna *tamas*. Naturally, the division of eternity into α and ω states is necessarily somewhat of an artificial segmentation. From the angle of history, it is a useful pedagogical projection; from the eternal “viewpoint” it is chiefly metaphorically applicable.

Schema I

The Atemporal and Temporal States and Corresponding Archetypal and Formal Vocabulary

α Eternity	formless divine archetypes
Protological	“intelligible archetypes” (= intelligible forms)
Historical	“sensible archetypes” (= forms)
Eschatological	“transfigured forms” (= mutually transparent archetypes and forms)
ω Eternity	“return” to α eternity state

In schema II, the atemporal and temporal states are denoted by the various nouns, whereas the movement of the

archetypes and forms through the corresponding states is indicated by the respective arrows.

Schema II
Atemporal and Temporal Procession of the States and Their
Archetypes and Forms



The Imams, while recognizing the natural finitude of the formal aspects of the Qur'an, as well as its simultaneously necessary perfection on account of its continuity with the *Umm al-Kitab*, naturally look forward in holy anticipation to the "time" of the eschaton when the formless archetype of the Qur'an, the *Umm al-Kitab*, will shine transparently through the "historical" Book. The change is of course a transformation, initiated by the Mahdi, in the perceptive powers of humanity; again, this is essentially the Sufic *kafsh*. The pure Intellect in humanity will be unhindered by the density of the *tamas* guna. The human mind will then be able to pierce effortlessly through the veils of the cosmic phenomena. The Imams, realizing that from the Absolute point of view no one or no thing can oppose the Will of God,³ naturally teach that the Vulgate Qur'an is the version willed by God as the historical Qur'an; to the essence (*Umm al-Kitab*) through the form (historical Qur'an).

³ Paul also proposes this view in his *Letter to the Romans* chapter 9. In chapter 11:33-34, he concludes that the issue of free will and predestination is an insoluble mystery at the level of human reason. But his question in verse 34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" is answered in *1 Corinthians* chapter 2, where he observes that the Spirit is given to humanity for the revelation of the mysteries of God. This is in accord with the *Book of Wisdom* 9:17: "And who shall know thy thought, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?" In this context, the Spirit corresponds to the pure Intellect, as explicated by Plotinus. The mysteries of free will and predestination must ultimately penetrate and embrace each other dialectically.

Each of the various states, archetypes, and forms of the above two schemata participate in each other. Thus, though the eschatological state is not to be identified with ω eternity, nevertheless, the former is a proleptic foreshadowing, foretaste of, or opening out towards the latter, given their continuity which ultimately or essentially links them. The eschatological state is also a return to the conditions that prevailed in the primordial Golden Age, when according to tradition, all the forms of creation, including the human body, shone with the divine Light. In the historical state, the archetypes and forms are certainly “connected,” but the light of the archetype is dimmed by veils when viewed from the formal side of manifestation. In the eschatological state, the veils of darkness will be removed, and the clear light of heaven, of the pure Intellect, will shine through the forms unimpeded.

The eschatological state parallels the transfigured state, or station, which the mystic can to some degree attain even now in the historical realm. Metaphysical interpretation of the Qur’an is precisely a “view” into the *Umm al-Kitab* through the “lens” or “gate” of the formal, historical Qur’an. Those who are “brought near,” are brought near the “coinciding” point of the archetypes and forms. Distance is darkness; nearness opens out onto unending light.

ESSAY II

The Spirituality of the Desert

The rigorous mercy of the harsh divine Sun of Wisdom enables the mind to pierce through the entifying gravitas of the forms of terrestrial phenomena and appearances. When the pure Intellect shines through the reasoning powers of humanity, the immutable divine archetypes are unveiled to our intellectual gaze. We see “on earth as it is in heaven.” The heavenly archetypes shine through their terrestrial manifestations; which implies that forms are but the manifestations on the sensorial plane of the supra-local and supra-temporal archetypes. The latter are covered with the veils which necessarily accompany and make possible all manifestation.

The unmanifest archetypes are composed of the divine Light, which according to sura *An-Nur* is “light upon light”—the unitive Light issues forth into multiplicity, thus presenting the enigma of the reality of the One in relation to the Many. To understand by intellection the riddle of the One and the Many is to perceive simultaneously the continuity existing between the divine archetypes and their sensorial embodiments known as forms. Intellection perceives that archetypes and forms are linked as subject and object in a way that ultimately results in a *coniunctio oppositorum*, which issues from the transcendence of polarities in the noetic vision resulting from the *unio mystica*. As a human constitutes a triadic unity of *corpus*, *anima*,⁴ and *intel-*

⁴ The *anima*, or soul, is the seat of the reasoning powers (*ratio*), whereas the spirit as *Intellectus* is the source of pure intellection; “pure” denoting “simplex” or non-discursive. The *Intellectus* dimension of the human mind (we may so speak, for the *ratio* is the “gate” of, or to, the *Intellectus*) can be indicated by the German word *Geist*, which may be translated as both “mind” and “spirit.” Using upper and lower case forms to convey subtle yet vital nuances, we may say that the “mind” indicates *ratio* and that “Mind” denotes *Intellectus*. Naturally, “intellect” may in certain contexts denote *ratio*, and “Intellect” the *spiritus/Intellectus*. We would also add in this context that the “pneumatic” dimension of the central nervous system, and of neural net activity in general, is in fact the result of the presence of the transnoetic *Intellectus*.

lectus (= *spiritus*), so the unit we will designate as archetype-form is inseparable. The form is the natural “growth” or extension of the archetype emerging forth into the realm of the senses, which is equivalent to saying the realm of matter, i.e., sensorial matter. Intelligible matter and sensorial matter are not two separate matters, but a single matter in two modes of “existence,” of “standing-forth,” and therefore of “emergence.” Matter is “manifestation,” either in the celestial realm or the mundane realm. The question is the particular modes of manifestation operative in the two realms, which again are ultimately not two separate kingdoms, for the celestial domain, which also may be legitimately termed the divine realm (in distinction naturally from the divine *Ipsum Esse*), also participates in the contingent order of existence, in its own appropriate way of course.⁵ The spiritual and mundane realms, or manifestations of entification, exist along a certain line of continuity by virtue of the bond between the archetypes and forms.

In the sensorial domain, the blinding light of the sun is a most fitting symbol for the unmanifest being of the archetypes, at least from the earthly perspective; and upon the earth, the fullest revelation of the archetypal energies behind forms is revealed by the unrelenting light of the desert sun. The very barrenness and emptiness of the desert mirror the “invisibility” (again, from the sensorial point of view) of the divine realities.

⁵ If the celestial order participates in contingency, the divine archetypes, which are “unmanifest” from the earthly angle of vision, must in a certain sense be “manifest” in heaven from the point of view of the non-contingent. According to this paradigm, the celestial realm consists of two orders: the contingent and the non-contingent. The non-contingent is the realm of the pure Intellect as divine emanation. Insofar as the divine archetypes reflect and thus participate (for reflection is impossible without some mode or degree of participation) in their own way in the pure Intellect, they possess an element of non-contingency. We may also observe that the pure Intellect, inasmuch as it “incarnates” as *spiritus* in the human triadic unity, participates, dialectically speaking, in contingency in non-contingent mode. This is to imply that the *Ipsum Esse* and the creation must be “related” in a spiritual bond which gives rise to the enigmatic reality of the One and the Many. If there were no relationship between Creator and created, then the created would “be” utter nothingness, which is as manifestly absurd as it is impossible.

It is in the solitude of the desert, in the kingdom of emptiness, that humanity is most naturally and fully aware of the immensity of the divine presence. All that is false is burned away, and reason opens out onto pure intellection. The limitations of life open out onto unlimited divine infinities; the vicissitudes of the wheel of time open out onto so many unbounded eternities.

When the sun sets in the desert, the pure darkness descends, and like the blindness of the brilliant, transfiguring power of the sun, the night's blackness in its own way reflects the unseen celestial mysteries.⁶ In the deepest night, the rivers of stars speak of the piercing energy of the divine luminosities which human wisdom has perennially spoken of as the eternal archetypes. And in the silence, the fragrance of heaven's incense hangs suspended in the mystic circle of the kingdom of the night of revelation.

This is the spirituality of the divine desert . . .

⁶ *Psalm* 138/139:12: "But darkness shall not be dark to thee, and night shall be light as the day: the darkness thereof, and the light thereof are alike to thee."

ESSAY III

The Celestial Nature of Christ and the *Intellectus* and *Ratio*

We may refer to the celestial and earthly dimensions of Christ in order to accentuate Aquinas' teaching on the distinction between the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of the preexistent Word. The Word can hypostatically unite with, or "theophanically in-presence" persons other than Jesus. Islam recognizes the essence, metaphysically understood, of the two natures, but a providentially divergent mode of theological formulation prohibits Islam from simply adopting the Church's language, or from understanding it in an unmodified sense. A "northern" viewpoint should not and cannot be reduced to a "southern" viewpoint. The same applies to providentially diverse and divergent theological visions.⁷

Christians, even admirers of Aquinas, are as a general rule unaware of the angelic Doctor's teachings concerning the possibility of a multiplicity of hypostatic unions. We can use the term celestial dimension to designate what has been traditionally called the divine nature of Christ in order to accentuate the differentiations demanded by the dynamic process by which the non-contingent divine Word unites with a human person in the contingent order. The interplay of human contingency and divine non-contingency, even if the interplay is effected in a non-contingent mode, is denoted, in this paradigm, by the term celestial nature. The Trinity is not "Father, Jesus, and Mary," but is "Father, Son, and Spirit." We may speak of the celestial and earthly dimensions of Christ, with all the proper qualifications naturally required by the Thomasian and Islamic theological wisdoms. The term celestial nature seeks to express the subtle yet metaphysically indispensable ontological differentiation implied by the interplay of the contingent and non-contingent natures in mutual "reciprocity" on the contingent plane. Given the wide-

⁷ This is the basic paradigm established by Frithjof Schuon in his monograph, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*; it is essentially also found in the writings of Nicolas of Cusa.

spread simplistic notion that identifies Jesus with the Logos in an exhaustive sense, especially among evangelical Protestants, an investigation into the mystery may help elucidate the matter at hand.

The Sufi doctrine of theophany (*tajalli*) holds that theophanies (*tajalliat*) are manifestations of the divine Names, or attributes. God manifests the divine Reality by means of the divine Names. The manifestation of the divine nature, in view of its interplay with contingency, in this context, with human nature, cannot be considered as the *Ipsium Esse*, or the Beyond-Being. The term “divine nature” from this angle of vision is reserved for the Unmanifest divine Essence. Once it interfaces with, or manifests in, the contingent order, it might more appropriately be denominated “celestial” in order to accentuate the associative dimension or aspect of contingency involved. If there is a real “union” (interface) between the two, both must be “modified” in some sense, speaking from the level of “appearances”; that is to say, the reciprocal interaction results in a new reality, a *tajalli*; otherwise the idea of union would have no significance sufficient to justify the existence or use of the term “union.” This union is of course not a “con-fusion” but a union in the sense of an “interface.”

From the perspective of the doctrine of *tajalli*, the divine Names, or attributes, are theophanically manifested. Because of a providential emphasis on the attribute of God known as the Logos, the Christian tends to de-emphasize the divine attributes other than the Word. If the divine Word is united with Jesus, as Aquinas states this cannot be in an exhaustive sense. One could expand this insight by observing that given the infinitude of the divine attributes, therefore the plenitude of the attributes—or even the fullness of a single attribute—cannot exhaustively unite, or interface, with a single human nature. A single human being could never theophanically express all the divine attributes. Christ is united with the Word, Mary with Wisdom; though of course all attributes, given their essential infinitude, interpenetrate each other’s essential divine reality, justifying the Muslim claim that the Prophet of Islam realizes all divine virtues and attributes. The manifestation of the infinitude of the attributes requires an entire cosmos which is infinite *in potentia* in

order to theophanically reveal and express the infinitude of the divine attributes. The finitude of the universe, suggested by its temporal creation, opens out onto the infinitude implicate in its supra-temporal “co-eternal” emanation.

“Whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God” (sura 2:115). “Everything will perish save His Face” (sura 28:88). Face denotes Essence, but the divine Essence can only be indirectly revealed through the attributes, the Names of God. The metaphor Face denotes the “outward” aspect of the “inward” divine Essence. If we can apply the metaphor Face to the *Ipsum Esse*, this implies that the divine Essence, on account of an intra-Divine reality, “overflows,” in Plotinian terms, “outwards” or “towards” the contingent order, resulting in cosmic manifestation. The principle towards manifestation is implied in the Beyond-Being (*epekeina tes ousias*),⁸ otherwise *beings* would not *be*. The essence of Proclus’ doctrine of the *henads* (the “ones,” the divine “units,” which Proclus equates with the traditional gods) as enjoying the status of Beyond Being which is that of the One Itself as First Principle, implies that in order for there to be delimited diversity in the cosmos, multiplicity must be “pre-figured” in some sense in the unitive Beyond Being, the First Principle.⁹ If there were no such “prefiguration,” if there were no “continuity” between Being (or Beyond-Being) and beings, then, as we have remarked before, beings would not be, which is simply impossible, given the evident fact of cosmic existence. The Beyond-Being “overflows” in order for the cosmic manifestation to emerge onto the plane of entification. This principle is that of immanence “oriented” towards transcendence, and may be represented as a singularity point in or at which “collapse” or co-incide the Latin prepositions *in* and *ex* used in the terms *in*

⁸ Aquinas’ term *Ipsum Esse* agrees in essence with the Platonic concept of *epekeina tes ousias*.

⁹ Proclus is proposing what in essence we also find with reference to Muhammad in Qur’an 38:5: “How can he claim that all the gods are but one God?” Furthermore, Proclus’ placement of the *henads* between the first and second principles (the One, the *Nous*) recalls to us Philo’s doctrine of the “Archangelic” nature of the Logos, which, like the *Ruh* (Spirit) in Islamic speculative theology, is in a certain sense neither created nor uncreated.

Deo (representing God's immanence with regard to the cosmic emanation) and *creatio ex nihilo* (representing God's transcendence to creation). The singularity point embodies a transcendence of the opposites immanence and transcendence. (The same and the different, the *tauton* and the *heteron*, as well as form and essence, would also collapse in singularity). If immanence and transcendence did not interface at the singularity point, the *ex* of cosmic manifestation would have no being, and the immanence denoted by *in* would never give rise to *ex*. Qur'an sura 57:3 proclaims God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent: "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things."

It is intriguing to note the orthographic similarity shared between the Greek preposition "in" (*en*) and the Greek number "one" (*hen*), both of which are spelled epsilon-nu; the two words are distinguished from each other only by the initial aspirate of *hen*. The question of the One and the Many implies the relationship between immanence and transcendence. The One as the Within, the Inward, the Immanent, indicates the divine self-"subsistence." The One is related to the Many in both immanent and transcendent mode. The "in" suggests the divine Essence, which is ever simplex, the multiplicity of attributes and Names applying strictly to the divine presence. Sura 50:3 denominates God as "the Outward and the Inward." The Outward pertains to the divine Names. The titles Inward and Outward must apply, respectively, to the unrevealed and un-revealable divine Essence, and to God as revealed, that is, to the divine presence, or presencing-forth. The distinction between essence and revelation with regard to God leads the perspective of gnosis (intellection) to speak of the "God above God." Of course, even the "In" and the "One" are but metaphorical or analogical designations of the divine Essence, for the latter is without any attribute or qualification whatsoever, to the point of even the negation of the "way of negation," the *via negativa*. Since language in itself is a process of "metaphorization," there is no designation of God that can ultimately be non-metaphorical, be it termed "God," "Essence," "*Ipsum Esse*," "Being," "Beyond-Being," "Possibility of Being," "Ground of Being," "Nirguna-Brahman," "the One," etc. Such language can be adequate in varying degrees of and for

approximations, but never as fully circumscribing the ultimately supra-verbal Reality which is the divine in Itself.

* * *

Schema of the Divine-Cosmic Quaternity

Divine Essence	Non-contingent; no archetypes; Undifferentiated Simplex
Divine Being	Non-contingent, demiurge; <i>Nous</i>
Celestial Realm	Contingent, formless archetypes
Terrestrial Realm	Contingent, forms

The divine as Essence is “God above God”; the divine as Being is the Creator; this differentiation is paralleled in Philo’s distinction between *ho theos* and *theos*. The continuity which exists between the non-contingent *Nous* and the contingent celestial realm of the archetypes explains why the Logos in Philo is at once neither uncreated nor created, “but in between these two extremes” (*Her.* 206). Of course, all four entries in this schema interface with each other in descending or ascending order. The distinctions are therefore principally, though not exclusively, of a pedagogical nature. The archetypes inhere in the *Nous*; yet from another viewpoint, the *Nous* is transcendent in relation to the archetypes. The celestial and terrestrial realms are inseparable; if there is a celestial archetype, it must needs be manifested in the terrestrial sphere (and vice versa, since both are an inseparable reality). The “cosmos” embraces both the celestial and terrestrial realms.

Lest it be objected that the celestial realm of archetypes is non-contingent, we will remind the reader of Plotinus’ *Enneads* II:4.4, referring to the Intelligible Realm: “No doubt that Realm is, in the strict fact, utterly without parts, but in some sense there is part there too.” Furthermore, as Plotinus also teaches, *Nous* participates in unity and multiplicity. On account of this “complexity” we denominate the Intelligible Realm the celestial, not the “divine,” realm. Of course terminology is fluid, and for

Plotinus the term *theos* is most applicable to the demiurge rather than to the Beyond-Being, or the One.

For Christian theology, the celestial nature of Christ pertains, on account of the union of the Logos with a created human nature, to the celestial realm of contingency; the question of the status of the Logos as such is naturally a separate yet related question. From a Plotinian paradigm, the divine, *theos*, as we have remarked, pertains to the demiurge, not to the Beyond-Being. The archetypes are the "ideas" of the demiurge, but strictly speaking, there is only a single divine Idea, namely, the Logos as such; when speaking of divine ideas, we must understand the ideas as varying aspects of the unitary divine Idea, not as separate Ideas per se. Here plurality denotes plurality of aspect and mode, not of essence or substance.

For Plotinus, the divine Essence has no "presence" or realm, otherwise It would be contingent. The divine presence (presencing) and the divine Essence must therefore be distinguished from each other. The demiurge is the *Nous*; he contemplates the cosmos into being by applying images (forms) upon passive nature, by applying sensible form upon intelligible form; "intelligible" implying the thoughts in the demiurge's mind. The One is neither a Being nor an Essence, strictly speaking, but is the origin (in a qualified sense) of all existence, the possibility of all existence. *Nous* contemplates the One; this produces the forms which are the basis of all existents. The One corresponds to the Platonic Beyond-Being. Discursive thought stands over against *theoria*; the latter is the only *via* to reach full knowledge of the One. The One is the center of the *stanchion*, the framework of existents, and this is produced by *Nous* through contemplation. The divine "overflow" of the One results in the cosmic emanation. The One's self-contemplation is *Nous*; the Upanishadic doctrine of the cosmic manifestation as the result of Brahman's self-contemplation is a precise parallel. According to *Enneads* V.1.5, the One is beyond number, be it one, three, or any other figure. Nicolas of Cusa made use of this argument in his written dialogues with Islam, thus controversially positing a relativity not only of Islamic monotheism, but also of the Christian concept of the Trinity. *Nous* is both unity and multiplicity. The

Platonic Ideas (forms) *eide* are the thoughts of the *Nous*. The Intellect is *Nous*, the demiurge is *theos*. Therefore *theos* is not equivalent to Beyond-Being; (this accentuates the difference between *theos* and the celestial realm in our explication above). The One's overflowing, or outflow, or opening out towards transcendence, is the *Nous*. The spiritual, noetic cosmos is from *Nous*; the material cosmos is from the Soul (*anima mundi*; world Soul).

Here we have reached the limit of the Plotinian paradigms which are directly related to our present investigations, though a few final concerns must be addressed. How is it possible for the Many to issue forth from the One? What is the relationship between the One and the Many? How can Multiplicity differ qualitatively from the One from which it emerges? How can the Absolute remain "untouched" and "unaffected" by the relative cosmic manifestation which emerges from the One, or conversely, how can creation possess a different nature than the Creator's divine nature? According to the Neoplatonic authorities, a qualitative ontological change, a new level of being, is effected through emanational procession; yet how can one category or level of being give rise to a different category or level of being? John Dillon has offered a suggestive comparison relating to this question by analogically referring to the scientific phenomenon of various quantum particles combining to give rise to qualitatively different particles: "... the phenomenon of 'emergence', whereby a certain combination of elements, with nothing further added except the peculiar nature of the combination itself, produces a sudden qualitative alteration which results in the generation of a new level of being."¹⁰ This process is mirrored in the Neoplatonic concept of procession (emanation) and reversion (*epistrophe*). The analogy is admittedly helpful, but while it offers a helpful parallel from the physical world, the Neoplatonic paradox involved is far from

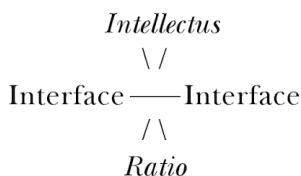
¹⁰ See John Dillon, "Damascius on Procession and Return," in John J. Cleary (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven University Press, 1997), 379.

being unraveled, for Dillon offers more of a description than an explanation in this context.

The “image” is the mediating link between essence and form. On account of both the Thomasian doctrine of the Analogy of Being and the Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being, which is to say that on account of the link between Being and beings, the Intellect observes things as they are in themselves. The *ratio*, however, observes things only as they appear. But the *Intellectus* and *ratio* participate in each other, so that from another angle, the *ratio* can also be said to perceive things in themselves. Yet we must not lose site of the following principles: The *Intellectus* perceives phenomena from a plenary angle in synthetic mode; by contrast, the *ratio* perceives phenomena from a partial angle in discursive mode.

According to Plotinus, dialectic enables us to synthesize complex knowledge, and by synthesis to arrive at contemplation of the One; thus the goal of dialectic is to arrive at the viewpoint of *Intellectus*, not *ratio*. Dialectic is a “reduction” to unity; it distinguishes in its preliminary stages, but ends in synthetic intellection. As Plotinus phrases it, dialectic “clears the ground” through logic in order to attain unitive synthesis.

Ratio is the inverse reflection of the *Intellectus*, which perceives the whole simultaneously and instantaneously; this perception is conveyed to the *ratio*, which must “process” the contemplation in discursive mode. This corresponds, to a degree, with Aquinas’ doctrine on angelic thought and language as instantaneous and simultaneous.



The interface between *Intellectus* and *ratio* can illuminate the question of the priority of intellection or rational thought. Ultimately, since *Intellectus* is originative matrix and “summative” goal of *ratio*, *Intellectus* has priority over *ratio*. From the viewpoint

of discursive thought, *ratio* has a relative priority over *Intellectus*,¹¹ relative simply because the function and operation of *Intellectus* does not directly pertain to complexity and delimited diversity. However, because in view of the interface between It and *ratio*, the *Intellectus* issues forth *ratio*, and therefore *Intellectus* must itself in a sense possess a dimension of *ratio*; *Intellectus* thus retains priority over *ratio*. The question of the priority of *Intellectus* and *ratio* thus mirrors the relationship between the One and the Many. Both must be related; the Many must be “prefigured” dialectically in the pure One. *Ratio* must be “prefigured” in *Intellectus*, otherwise there would be no *ratio* at all. *Intellectus* “overflows” and thus *ratio* arises. From the perspective of *Intellectus*, *ratio* emanates from and resides in *Intellectus*. From the perspective of *ratio*, the latter is a *creatio ex nihilo* by the *Intellectus*, and the latter is utterly transcendent to *ratio*.

Intellectus and *ratio* are not two separate realities, but two aspects of the single reality of consciousness in Itself, which is to say of Being. *Ratio* is *Intellectus* in contingent, formal mode; *Intellectus* is formless, and *ratio* is the formal field of consciousness, or Being.

Any attempted solution to the perennial debate concerning the priority of ratiocination or intellection with regard to the attainment of knowledge of the divine must embrace a certain interplay or integration of both reason and Intellect. According to the Qur’anic Light Verse, “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth,” and this reality consists of “Light upon Light.” In the metaphysical illumination, subject and object are transcended, and God is the sole Perceiver, the sole Seer. The sons of Wisdom “form their ideas of God from God, of light from light” (Philo, *Praem.* 46). “So the things also that are of God no one knoweth but the Spirit of God. Now we have received . . . the Spirit of God. . . . We have the mind of Christ” (*1 Corinthians* 2:11-12, 16). “And who shall know thy thought, except thou give Wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above” (*Book of Wisdom* 9:17). The

¹¹ From this point of view we can affirm that the pure Intellect does not in every respect replace but chiefly confirms the content of *ratio*. Theologically this establishes the need of an interplay between the esoteric and exoteric; metaphysical illumination must accord with the traditional wisdoms.

same dynamic is alluded to in Qur'an sura 50:16: "We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." Finally, Aquinas in his *Summa contra gentiles* LI writes: "Hence, if God's essence is to be seen, the intellect must see it through the divine essence itself, so that in such vision the divine essence shall be at once the object which is seen and that whereby it is seen." Through reason we deduce God's existence, through illumination his Being; yet even our recognition of God's existence is God seeing God. Our contemplation is God's self-contemplation, which is to say that *ratio* is an emanation (Philo would also say a fragment) of the pure Intellect. As a result, we know God through or with God's self-knowledge, or better, God knows himself "within" us.

The *Intellectus-ratio* interface is analogous to the *aevum* viewed as interface between eternity and temporality. Regarding time, relative time pertains to the field of the partial; simultaneity of all temporal tenses represents what one may call absolute time¹² (for every relative is relative with reference to an absolute), of time viewed from the field of the whole. Similarly, *Intellectus* represents plenary consciousness, absolute awareness, whereas *ratio* pertains to partial consciousness striving towards the whole. When the *Intellectus* interfaces with *ratio*, the passage into the latter is experienced by the former as what it truly is, namely, a revelation. For unaided, *ratio* could never access the truths of revelation; yet *ratio* and *Intellectus* are inseparable, so that it is artificial indeed to imply that the mind could exist without the divine Mind. There is no "natural" revelation, for by virtue of the bond between the mind and Intellect, the "natural" *ratio* is a "celestial" phenomenon by virtue of its origin in and its bond with *Nous*.¹³ Indeed, *ratio* is simply the perception of *Nous*, a perception made possible by the existence of the transnoetic Intellect. Finally, the point of interface between the *Intellectus*

¹² What we here call Absolute time is not to be confused with strict Eternity, but rather a sort of participated, reflected eternity of an analogical nature.

¹³ The following propositions also deserve consideration in this context: The power of *ratio* is to open itself to the revelation of the *Intellectus*. The power of discursive thought is to recognize and intuit when to open and surrender itself to synthesis.

and *ratio* involves a mystery not directly accessible to ordinary, or discursive thought. Like the concept of time dilation, to begin to understand the *Intellectus-ratio* interface would require a “counter-intuitive” wisdom which would integrate discursive thought with more “synthetic” dialectical approaches founded upon analogical cognitive-intellective models.

archegos

5. Immanent *Intellectus* and Divine Self-Contemplativity

Peripatetic philosophy rightly stresses that there can never be a direct perception by the created mind of the divine Reality, or Essence. According to standard theology, the only way this could be achieved on a “creaturely” level would be in an incarnation of God, or in Hindu terminology, in an *avatara*. It is certainly true that the divine Essence, not being *res* or object, can never be perceived, as “perception” implies and necessitates an “object” that is perceived. The divine Essence is not an object, therefore It cannot be perceived, except by Itself in the Divine Self-Contemplativity; only God can know God.

The utterance of Christ in *John* 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” invoked by the Church Fathers as an incarnation proof-text, is immediately followed by the Messiah’s declaration: “Have I not said that ye are gods?” One of the senses here in which Christ “is” God therefore also seems to apply to humans in some general sense.¹ We are not seeking by any means to de-emphasize the undeniable uniqueness of Christ as an *avatara*, but only to accentuate the teaching of this same Christ on the exalted status of humanity as the *imago Dei*. *Colossians* 2:9, another traditional proof-text for the incarnation, is similarly immediately followed by the claim in verse 10 that the plenary divine indwelling enjoyed by Christ is also that of believers, through Christ: “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally; And you are filled in him. . . .” The 19th century German Catholic theologian Matthias Scheeben held that the union of the Church and Christ is none other than an extension

¹ On the similarities between the *John* 10 passage and the understanding of “divinity” as “the heritage of all men born on earth,” see W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion. A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1966), 270-71.

or prolongation of Christ's own hypostatic union, and *Colossians* 2:9-10 provides key support for the orthodoxy of Scheeben's thesis. As *Colossians* demonstrates the truth of a single divine fullness shared between Christ and the Church, a similar paradigm appears in the *Gospel of John* with regard to knowledge of God. *John* 1:18: "No one hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Only God can know God; yet the Son's unique knowledge of God is imparted to his Church. This is implied in the phrase, "the Son hath declared God," and is made explicit in *John* 10:14-15, which, note well, immediately precedes the passage in verses 30ff. concerning the "deity" of Christ, but also, *mutatis mutandis*, that of humanity in general. The correct punctuation is vitally important in this verse, as a careful reading will reveal: "I am the good shepherd; and I know mine, and mine know me as the Father knoweth me, and as I know the Father." Here there is a qualitative identity between the Son's and the sheep's knowledge of God, just as we have simultaneously Christ as the Son of God and the sheep (i.e., humans) as gods and Sons of God in verses 30-36.²

Paul tells us that only God can know God, yet he then writes, "But we have the mind of Christ," the Plotinian cosmic *Nous*, Logos, the Qur'anic *Kitab*. Al-Hallaj proclaimed: "I am the Reality"; that is, "I am God," and he was martyred for this proclamation. But he was no more unorthodox than was Christ when the latter said, "I and the Father are one" in conjunction with "ye are gods." In ancient Judaism, the antediluvian patriarch Enoch was deified through apotheosis and proclaimed

² Christ is quoting *Psalms* 81/82:6: "I have said: You are gods and all of you the sons of the Most High." Interestingly, the Psalm applies this to wicked human judges who disregard the unfortunate in society. Their judgment will be death, as threatened in verse 7: "But you like men shall die." Therefore we can conclude that all of humanity, righteous and unrighteous alike, are entitled to be called gods, for humanity as a whole was made in the image of God. Christ in *John* 10 is therefore arguing that if the scriptures call even the wicked the "Sons of God," then how can his opponents criticize him for calling himself the Son of God? Christ is not accentuating his divinity here, but rather his humanity's source in the Divine, the Divine which is the creative origin of all humanity, made in the divine image.

“the Lesser YHWH” (3 *Enoch*). We are reminded of Christ who said: “The Father is greater than I.” It is to Christ in his glorified human nature as the Sacred Heart that God has bestowed upon the Messiah the divine Name above all names (*Philippians* 2). The *Philippians* Christological hymn, a further traditional proof-text of Christ’s divinity, therefore in reality treats of the glorified humanity of Christ, and not directly of his divine nature, though the latter is not unrelated to the reality contemplated here.

According to 2 *Corinthians* 3:16, a veil is removed upon recognition of Jesus as Messiah, and one then beholds the glory of the Lord with open (unveiled) face;³ this glory is the divine presence, not the Essence; yet we are transformed into this very “image”:

2 *Corinthians* 3:16-18

16 . . . the veil shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

³ 2 *Corinthians* 3:14-16: “But their senses were made dull. . . . The veil is upon their heart. But when they shall be converted to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” Compare this with Qur’an sura 17:45-46a: “When thou recitest the Qur’an We place between thee and those who believe not in the life to come, a dark veil; And We put coverings over their hearts lest they should understand it, and in their ears a heaviness.” With both of these passages we may compare *Isaiah* 6:9-10, cited by Christ during his ministry: “And he said: Go, and thou shalt say to this people: Hearing, hear, and understand not; and see the vision, and know it not. Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” That which overcomes blindness of heart is the *unio mystica*, the removal of the veils of cosmic multiplicity issuing forth into the “vision” or realization of the One. This unity is proclaimed in sura 17:46b and 57: “And when in the Qur’an thou namest thy One Lord, they turn their backs in flight. . . . Those whom ye call on, themselves desire union with their Lord, striving which of them shall be nearest to Him. . . .”

The glory of the Lord is the divine image, the manifestation or revelation. We become the image and revelation of God.

Regarding the much-discussed verse *1 Corinthians* 2:9, “But, as it is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him,’”⁴ we can say that God has prepared the vision of Himself by Himself within the human heart. This vision of the Essence is impossible to attain by the created intellect; but the uncreated Intellect, which is precisely the divine self-contemplativity, is bestowed upon humanity by virtue of the divine Indwelling within the human heart. The vision of the Essence is seen “in,” but not “by,” the human mind; the vision of God is seen by God and by God alone. It is possible that Paul’s quotation of scripture in *1 Corinthians* 2:9 was prompted by logion 17 of the *Gospel of Thomas*: “Jesus said this: ‘I will give you what eye has not seen, what has not been heard, and what hand has not touched, and what has not entered the human mind.’” Again, that this gift refers to the vision of God is perhaps indicated by the immediately preceding logion 16, if the word “father” in this particularly enigmatic saying is indeed a reference to God: “Jesus said this: ‘When you look upon him who was not born of

⁴ The early Fathers write that in *1 Corinthians* 2:9, Paul is quoting from the *Book of Elijah*, considered by modern scholarship as either questionable or as no longer extant. While the present author was translating the Hebrew *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it was with surprise that he discovered that the Hebrew apocalypse contains the saying quoted by St Paul. The author was pleased to learn that at least one other scholar, Richard J. Bauckham, had also recognized the Elijah saying of *1 Corinthians* 2:9 in the Hebrew *Apocalypse of Elijah*. Bauckham cites Buchanan’s translation of the passage from Elijah: “But the eye cannot see the greatness and glory which the holy One blessed be he will provide for his sons.” See Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Brill: Leiden, Boston, Köln, 1998), 59. Bauckham notes that the most recent comprehensive study of the extant Elijah materials overlooked this important identification. The Hebrew text of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* as established by M. Butterworth in the 19th century reflects a recension apparently “corrected” to agree with the Masoretic text of three biblical passages. We translate the passage as follows from Butterworth’s Hebrew text: “And all your sons will be taught of YHWH, and also: Great good will be to them who have love for your law, and also: How great is your goodness which you have stored up for those who fear you.”

woman, bow your face to the ground and worship him, for he is your father.” Finally, the same saying found in *Thomas* 17 and *1 Corinthians* 2:9 is included in the Islamic *Hadith Qudsi* spoken by God: “I have prepared for My righteous servants that which no eye hath seen and no ear hath heard, nor hath it occurred to the human heart.” We would suggest that the vision of the divine by the divine is here referred to, for the *manifestation* of God has certainly entered the human mind; but the vision of the Essence could never do so, given the infinite, even if relative, gulf between the divine and the contingent. Certainly the rewards of Paradise could be implied, but the highest reward therein is none other than the beatific vision of God “face to face.”

1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 16

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given to us from God.

16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Verse 16 implies that we have been gifted with the divine Mind, the Plotinian *Nous*. The import of the above verses is twofold. The knowledge referred to here pertains firstly to the “gifts” of God, that is, they signify the category of the divine Presence, or manifestation, which revelation we *are* by transformation in the Christ. This “transformation” is nothing other than the immanent presence within the cosmos and within us of *Nous*; and the transformation in the stages referred to in the phrase “from glory to glory” indicates a graduated unfolding or realization of this Intellect within the believer. Nevertheless, the “gifts” here must pertain not only to the divine presence, but in some sense also to the Essence Itself, for the gift here is precisely God’s own Self Knowledge (as is transparent in verses 11 and 12 cited

above), the divine self-interiority of Knowing-Being (Knowing = Being). Therefore, verse 11 indicates that we have been given not only knowledge of the things given us by God, but that this knowledge includes the impartation of the mystery of the divine self-interiority, or of God's Self-Knowing. But we must insist that we do not know God, for knowledge implies an object, and God is not such.

Of course, one can make a distinction between God's Essence, which can never be an object of perception, and God as Manifest, that is, the God of Revelation, who certainly can be, and in sacred scripture, is an "object" of perception and worship. The distinction in this context is that between Essence and Economy. We would remark here that instead of speaking of the Immanent and Economic Trinity, as did Karl Rahner, we should rather speak of the Immanent and Economic Deity, for the distinction or qualification of the Simple Essence as Persons or Trinity can only apply at the level of the divine Economy, not at the "level" of the Immanent Essence. Though we are dealing with subtle distinctions, they can be justified, we believe, by Nicolas of Cusa's insight in his *Pape de fidei*, that God in his Essence is beyond all number, be that One or Three; and we recall also Meister Eckhart's distinction between the Godhead as Essence and God as Personal or Trinitarian, and his remark that the Godhead is as far above God, to which the Trinitarian persons apply, as heaven is above earth ("God and the Godhead differ as much as do heaven and earth"). Naturally, since the immanent God and economic God are not two Gods, but one God under different modes of consideration—if this can be said of the Essence with any sort of qualified justification—one can justifiably relate the economic Trinity back to the immanent Deity, in the sense that Hindu theology does not make two Gods out of the Essence (*Nirguna-Brahman*, that is, God without attributes) and the Creator (*Saguna-Brahman*, that is, God with attributes); though in the end one must not lose sight of the distinguishing accentuation between the two terms. In Hinduism, as in the Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi's thought, the divine Essence must remain pure and free of creative activity; this accords eminently with Plotinus. For Ibn al-'Arabi, the Essence is not the Creator, the Divinity is. Though his language is different, in essence this

is nothing other than the distinction between the Immanent and Economic Deity.

We have the Spirit and Mind of Christ, which is that of God, and this implies that to us is given God's Self-Knowing and Being—for Knowing is Being, in the Plotinian paradigms. Yet the "us" here cannot be the created ego or human mind, but must be the divine element of the *Nous* immanent within the human mind. In Christ, this *Nous* "replaces" the created ego, as Paul proclaimed: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (*Galatians* 2:20). Even more pointedly, Christ declares in logion 108 of the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas*: "Whoever drinks from my mouth, he will be even as I am, and I will become he; and what is hidden will be made manifest to him."

The so-called drunken Sufis respond to this mystery with expressions such as: "I am the Reality"; "Glory be to me"; "There is nothing but God." Christ responds to the same mystery by saying: "I and the Father are one" and "ye are gods." St. John of the Cross, like the Sufis, responds by teaching: "We are God by participation," and clarifies that the Lover and Beloved are one, and that to see them as two is the result of a veil of an illusory separativity between, or constituting the duality of "I and Thou." In this sense, it was not the Prophet as Beloved who was conveyed to heaven by the divine Lover on the night of his *Mi'raj*. When the veil of separation is removed, we see the truth of the Qur'anic *aya* on the *Mi'raj*, which tells us the Prophet saw the signs of God in heaven; yet the *aya* ends by proclaiming that only *God* is the Seer, the Hearer: "Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, of which We have blessed the precincts that We may show unto him of Our signs; Verily He, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing" (sura *Bani-Israel* 1). But again we note: the Prophet saw the *signs* of God, not the divine Essence. Yet if this distinction is important, so it is also vital to recognize that by virtue of the *unio mystica* the Lover and Beloved, the I and Thou, are one, not two, and this precisely on account of God's self-knowing in the creature. The Prophet saw the signs of God; God saw and "was" the divine Essence "in" the Prophet. Similarly, in the Hebrew text of *Genesis*, when Hagar has a vision in the desert, she calls the sacred space where the vision took place *beer-lahai-roi*, which

in Hebrew is a profoundly ambiguous formulation, for it is not clear in this phrase whether God saw Hagar or Hagar saw God. This ambiguity relates to the fact that at one exegetical level God saw God “in” Hagar; that is, the ego of Hagar was not involved in the *visio Dei*; only the Self can know the Self. Though it is on the one hand legitimate to speak of the divine self-knowing as the Subject of knowledge, on the other hand we must qualify the word “subject,” for it implies an object, and God transcends the subject-object dichotomy, and neither element of the pair can apply to the divine in the strict sense.⁵

What we are left with to consider is a dynamic which involves a continuity between God’s Essence and God’s revelation(s), the latter constituting signs pointing to the divine Reality as such. The created mind is complex, the Uncreated Mind is simplex. Yet Meister Eckhart tells us that the human mind is “uncreated and uncreatable.” This is the Pure *Nous* of Plotinus’ doctrine, imparted, as St. Paul informs us, to believers. Therefore the Peripatetic paradigm stands justified: the divine Essence as *non-ens* cannot be known, for it is not an object of knowledge. Yet the divine Intellect is imparted to the creature, It dwells immanently within us, the divine Intellect which is the divine self-Interiority of Knowing-Being. And this trajectory is also known to Aquinas, as he writes in his *Summa contra gentiles* LI: “Hence, if God’s essence is to be seen, the intellect must see it through the divine essence itself, so that in such vision the divine essence shall be at once the object which is seen and that whereby it is seen.” We know God through his own self-knowing. But the latter perspective Aquinas inherited not from Aristotle, but from Plato, through the channels of the Christian synthesis of St. Paul, Plotinus, Proclus, and Deutero-Dionysius.⁶ And this leads

⁵ By the phrase “God in the strict sense” we refer to “God” as the unmanifest divine Essence, or Eckhart’s “Godhead” in contrast to the “economic” God, or God as He has revealed Himself. The economic God can legitimately be spoken of as an “object” of perception, devotion, theological discourse, etc., whereas this can never be the case with regard to the divine Essence, at least not in Itself as such.

⁶ We could not agree more with Frithjof Schuon’s censure of the term “Pseudo-Dionysius” (see his *Dimensions of Islam*, 112). By our term “deutero” we allude

us to a final observation that is often unrecognized by many “traditional” Thomists. Aquinas, though he is rightly known as the great Christian assimilator of Aristotle, by the very fact of his specifically Christian identity, represents a synthesis of Aristotle with the Neoplatonic heritage of the Christian tradition, which had adopted the systems of Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus via the works of Augustine in the West and Deutero-Dionysius in the East. The Thomist system is essentially a synthesis of Aristotle and Plato, with the Neoplatonic paradigms predominating. With all necessary qualifications freely admitted, we may confidently assert that Aquinas was, viewed from a Christian context, the last great Neoplatonic philosopher.⁷ To denominate him as a strictly or preeminently Peripatetic philosopher or theologian would be correctly to acknowledge his assimilation of Aristotle, but would also overlook his own religious self-identity and the Neoplatonic-Christian matrix to and into which he assimilated the Stagirite.

We can know that the divine Essence is, but not what It is,⁸ for the Essence is not “attainable” through knowledge in a cognitive mode, but only through “knowledge” in the mode of Union between the Lover and Beloved, in which union the distinction between the two is transcended, so that only God knows God. We cannot know God, but God can know God “within” us by his own self knowing. But dialectically expressed, this divine self knowing becomes our truest identity. And this divine self-identity of the

analogically to the use of the term “deutero-canonical” in the Roman Catholic understanding of scriptural canon and inspiration. The deutero-canonical books are as equally inspired as the primary canonical works. Our term Deutero-Dionysius, a term admittedly used by other scholars in a slightly different sense than employed by us, is intended in the present context in part as a censure of the term Psuedo-Dionysius.

⁷ We might call Aquinas a theologian-philosopher. In any case, Plotinus and Proclus can also equally be called both theologians and philosophers. They may be called theologians, for their philosophy was inseparable from a traditional school of wisdom that integrated sacred theurgy, a school which constituted a spiritual, religious path as devotional and earnest in the search for the Divine as encountered in any of the Great Religions.

⁸ On the divine self-knowledge, see Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence according to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2006).

believer is itself, according to Matthias Scheeben's paradigm, the result of the prolongation of Christ's own hypostatic union, for the mystical union of the Church with Christ flows from Christ's own hypostatic union with the Logos. Thus we can appreciate Meister Eckhart's claim that at the heights of spiritual realization one passes from the vision of God's Being (= revelation) to the "vision" of the divine Beyond-Being (Essence)⁹—for at this stage, the visionary's limited ego is extinguished in the divine, equivalent to the extinction known in Sufism as *fana*, so that God knows God "within" the believer. As far as the limited ego is concerned, it can only know that the Essence is, not "what" it is, given the incommensurable distance between the Creator and creature. Yet given the "continuity" between the Absolute and the relative—if there were no relationship between beings and Being (*Ipsum Esse*), then beings would not be at all, which is impossible—the cosmic *Nous* is immanent within the created intellect. If such were not the case, we could not even with special revelation comprehend that God is, leaving aside all questions of what the divine Essence is in Itself. The Peripatetic axiom that God in his Essence is unknowable is fully justified, as is the equally valid Sufi axiom that in *fana* God knows Himself "within" the believer. The two positions coexist in dialectical tension between the divine and the human self-identities/identity.

We will, in conclusion, briefly comment upon this same dialectical tension present in Aquinas' words cited previously. If "the intellect sees it," that is, the "divine essence itself," then the "intellect" in this case must be the divine Intellect immanent within the created intellect, for the created intellect can never see the divine Essence except in a dialectical sense in which the divine self-knowing becomes the truest self-identity of the crea-

⁹ Meister Eckhart's terminology differs from Aquinas', but can be reconciled with it. Western theologians tend to designate the divine Essence as "Being," hence Aquinas' *Ipsum Esse*. In the East, following Plato, theologians tend to designate the divine Essence as Beyond-Being. In any case, it is transparent that Aquinas means by *Ipsum Esse* the same Reality as denoted by the Eastern term Beyond-Being. For Eckhart, the term Being refers to the God of revelation, whereas Beyond-Being designates the divine Essence, the unrevealed and unrevealable God.

ture. Lastly, Aquinas' proposition that "in that vision the divine essence is both the object and the medium of vision," calls forth the following observations. Strictly speaking, the divine Essence cannot be the "object" of any contingent vision—only the God of revelation can be such; therefore we must understand Aquinas' language here as reflecting the dialectical tension between the transcendent divine self-contemplativity and the same divine self-knowing immanent within the created person or contingent knowing subject as its truest identity. This last phrase, "knowing subject," must also be understood in a dialectical sense, given the qualifications necessitated by the problematic polarity of subject-object.

6. The Neoplatonic and Thomistic Synthesis of *Esse* and *Ens*: Abrahamic and Hindu Contours

Aquinas and the Neoplatonic philosophers share a common achievement, namely, a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle on the central question of Being. This major endeavor of Aquinas allows us to characterize him to a certain degree as the last great Neoplatonic philosopher in the history of Christian thought. We by no means seek to deny the real areas of conflict between the angelic doctor and the divine Plato, especially with regard to certain (though naturally not all) issues of epistemology, for to be sure, on various topics Aquinas stands on the side of Aristotle; on the other hand, this is often done not “over against” Plato, but represents an assimilation or recognition of Aristotle in a Platonizing mode (indeed, a similar paradigm obtains with regard to Aristotle’s own “assimilation” of Plato).¹ Given this aspect of Aquinas, we may justly hold that although the outward edifice of Thomas is largely comprised of Aristotle’s categories, syllogistic structures, and other general formulae, nevertheless, to a significant and often unacknowledged degree, the soul that animates the Thomistic corpus is predominantly that of the Platonic trajectory (again, the same could be said in a modified sense of Aristotle himself, freely admitting all necessary qualifications). In the final analysis, the concordance between Aquinas and the Neoplatonists on the central question of Being, as explicated by Plato and Aristotle, justifies categorizing Aquinas as a Neoplatonic philosopher in the particular domain under consideration; at the very least one may confidently conclude that

¹ On possible syntheses of Plato and Aristotle, see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); George E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle From Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

the Neoplatonic influences in Aquinas are far more extensive and pervasive than often recognized.

In Aquinas the influence of Plato often derives chiefly indirectly via the great Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus, the latter principally through the medium of St. Dionysius, whom Aquinas quotes on more than 1,700 occasions. For Plato, Being (*ousia*) is derivative of the One, and this One, which is the Good, is thus necessarily “beyond Being” (*epekeina tes ousias*). For Aristotle, rather than the One (which is the Good) having the primacy, Being (*ousia*) represents the Reality above which there is none “higher.” To risk oversimplification, Aristotle accordingly concludes that God is the highest being (*ousia*), the highest concrete individual substance (*substantia*) or entity (*ens*). Aristotle’s view of God as the highest *ens* accords in certain ways with the usual monotheistic conceptions, as reflected, for instance, in the Arabic phrase, *Allahu akbar*, understood properly in the superlative sense, “God is greatest,” rather than in the strictly grammatical comparative sense, “God is greater.”² *Allahu akbar* implies that God is “the greatest God,” a phrase that repeatedly occurs in the ancient Jewish text *3 Maccabees*, and which reflects the Jewish orientation and scriptural usage in general. Aristotle’s superlative ontological view also roughly accords, admittedly not in every respect, with the Hindu Sanskrit designation *Paramatma*, that is, the “Supreme Self,” as it is usually rendered in English. This latter term at the purely lexical level corresponds to conceptions such as “the Supreme Being,” or “the Highest Being.” But according to the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Thomistic paradigms, God (the divine Essence) is neither the Supreme Being nor the Highest Being; God is rather Being Itself, *Ipsum Esse*, which in turn corresponds more or less to Beyond-Being. To speak of God as the Supreme or Highest Self, at the strictly lexical level, to a certain degree corresponds to Aristotle’s concept of God as the Highest *ens*, or entity. But the divine Essence as such is not the Supreme or Highest Self, but “Selfhood” Itself. The view that God is the Highest Entity is modified in the Platonic tradition as a whole, which reasons as follows: God is not

² After all, it is implied in the phrase “God is greater” that God is *always* greater, thus justifying the superlative rendering.

res, God is not an entity beside or among other entities; God is not even, strictly speaking, the Supreme or Highest Entity, or the Supreme or Highest Being, but rather Being Itself. “God” in this latter usage agrees with *Nirguna-Brahman*, God without attributes, the Unmanifest divine Essence. In *Paramatma*, the Sanskrit affix *para* (cognate with Greek *παρά*) means literally ‘beyond’, hence, ‘other’, ‘farthest’, and as a consequence, “Supreme Self” as a translation of *Paramatma* is justified. Yet inherent in ‘beyond’ and ‘other’ is the idea of transcendence; therefore, if *para* has “quantitative” properties, it also possesses “qualitative” dimensions. That is, the “supreme” opens out semantically onto the plane of transcendence, so that *Paramatma* can connote indirectly (and esoterically)³ “Other than Self,” “Beyond Self,” “Supra-Self,” “Not Self”; and these titles accord with the term Beyond-Being. The same opening towards transcendence implied in this context by ‘para’ may also be applicable to Aristotle’s concept of Divinity as the “highest” Being, so that “highest” is not to be understood in a limitative sense, either connotatively or denotatively.

The polyvalent, even “transvalent” quality of the term *Paramatma* can be illuminated with reference to the *Bhagavadgita* 15:17:

But yet another is the Supreme Being called
The Supreme Self [*Paramatma*], who as the Inexhaustable
Lord,
Pervades the three worlds and sustains them.

³ One could of course reformulate this conclusion and argue validly that although the affix *para* implies certain limitative semantic qualities at the lexical level, nevertheless from a strictly metaphysical perspective, in the term *Paramatma*, *para* is to be understood “non-literally,” and therefore *Paramatma* could apply *directly* to the Reality of the Unmanifest divine Essence, that is, to *Nirguna-Brahman*. In both perspectives one is dealing with varying nuances of a single truth rather than with exclusive or “excluding” alternatives.

As Radhakrishnan notes on this verse, *Paramatama* here denotes not *Nirguna-Brahman*, but *Saguna-Brahman*,⁴ and this interpretation is clearly correct, for the verse states that *Paramatma* as here envisaged enters into the realm of cosmic manifestation (“the three worlds”), and this cannot be said, *sensu stricto*, of the Unmanifest divine Essence. Additionally, and even more clearly, as the *Bhagavadgita* continues in 15:18, it is revealed that in this particular Hindu scripture *Paramatma* is specifically the *Avatara* Krishna: “And since I transcend the destructible, and since I am higher also than the indestructible, therefore am I celebrated in the world and in the Vedas as the Supreme Person.” The synonymous relationship (not strict identity) between verse 17’s term “Supreme Self” and verse 18’s term “Supreme Person” establishes an unmistakable parallelism in this regard. This contention is in any case confirmed throughout the *Gita*; for instance, in 10:12, Krishna the *Avatara* is addressed as *Parambrahma*: “You are the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Sanctifier, the holiest of the holy, the Eternal Being, the divine Person, the first god, the unborn, the all-pervading.” The attributes of Sanctifier, Person, and Cosmic Pervader apply more strictly speaking to Being rather than to Beyond-Being. Thus in this verse *Parambrahma* denotes the Manifest God, not the Unmanifest divine Essence, and this is understandable, in that the verse refers to the *Avatara* Krishna, and consequently not to the divine as Unmanifest, for the descent of an *Avatara* is a divine *manifestation* and *revelation* by definition.

Bhagavadgita Book 11 concerns the theophany of the Universal Form of God to Arjuna. This divine form, in that it is a form, and in that it is revealed, or manifested, must therefore pertain to Being rather than to Beyond-Being, which latter is strictly Unmanifest, and cannot be manifested as such in the order of contingency. And let us not overlook the fact that the Supreme Lord whose form is revealed to Arjuna in Book 11 is the form of the *Avatara* Krishna, under his celestial aspect to be sure. In *Bhagavadgita* 11:37 Arjuna addresses the *Avatara* Krishna:

⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (New Dehli: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 332.

... O exalted one who are greater than Brahma, and primal creator! O infinite Being, Lord of gods! O you pervading the universe! you are the indestructible, that which is, that which is not, and what is beyond them. You are the primal god, the ancient being, you are the highest support of this universe. You are that which has knowledge, that which is the object of knowledge, you are the highest goal. By you is this universe pervaded, O you of infinite forms!

Given that the *Avatara* Krishna is spoken of here in terms denoting the Unmanifest divine Essence, that is, “that which is, that which is not, and what is beyond them,” plainly meaning “You are being and non-being and what transcends being and non-being,” we see that the *Avatara* can speak in the Name of the Absolute Unmanifest, on account of the celestial nature “incarnate” on the earthly plane. *Bhagavadgita* 11:37 clearly “unifies” both Being and Beyond-Being (the equivalent of “non-being”), and this is consonant with the fact that *Nirguna-Brahman* and *Ishvarah*, the latter being the personal cosmic Lord, are not two separate Gods, so that Arjuna rightly assimilates the Personal God to the Supra-Personal (trans-personal) divine Essence, and this paradigm constitutes additional support for the suggestion that the semantic field of the term *Paramatma* encompasses polyvalent (and “transvalent”) applicability to both Being and Beyond-Being. Again, in *Bhagavadgita* 9:19, the *Avatara* Krishna proclaims: “I am that which is and that which is not,” that is, “I am being and beyond being.”

The “continuity” between *Nirguna-Brahman* and *Ishvarah* in the *Bhagavadgita* is understandable given that this entire sacred text is a dialog between the *Avatara* Krishna and the hero Arjuna. Because the *Upanishads* are not spoken by an *Avatara*, it is comprehensible that these metaphysical treatises, especially the *Mandukya Upanishad*, more sharply differentiate between *Nirguna-Brahman* and *Ishvarah* (= *Saguna-Brahman*) than is the case in the *Bhagavadgita*. Both perspectives are sacred, and the differences which obtain in these contexts can be traced to the fact that the *Bhagavadgita* is an “avatic” revelation, an “incarnational” proclamation, whereas the *Upanishads* are treatises of a more “systematic” metaphysical nature.

In the *Bhagavadgita*, at least at the lexical level, as we have explained “Supreme Self” denotes Being (*Ishvarah*), whereas “Beyond Self” denotes Beyond-Being, *Saguna-Brahman* and *Nirguna-Brahman* respectively. *Allahu akbar* corresponds precisely to this dual application of the term *Paramatma*, so that in its metaphysical sense the first part of the dual phrase *Allahu akbar* means “Beyond-Being,” that is, the Unmanifest divine Essence. Therefore, the denotative and the connotative semantic fields of *Allahu akbar* correspond to the theological and the metaphysical domains respectively. To be even more precise, *Allahu* corresponds to Beyond-Being, whereas *akbar* corresponds to Being and cosmic manifestation, for *akbar*, “greatest,” implies Greatness itself, and greatness implies immensity, that is, the tendency immanent within Beyond-Being to issue forth, through the Plotinian “overflow” which is Being, into cosmic multiplicity and expansiveness. Therefore, just as the *Shahadah* contains a summary of metaphysics in the form of two testifications or confessions of faith, the first testimony implying the Unmanifest, the second testimony implying cosmic manifestation, so the phrase *Allahu akbar* reflects these same two metaphysical realities in its two words.⁵

In Judaism, the proposition that YHWH is the greatest God among all gods refers to the reality of the Creator God as highest *ens*; the verses that by contrast denominate the “other gods” as “false gods,” that is, as not existing at all, and that specify that the Lord alone *is*, these verses refer to the Reality of the Unmanifest divine Essence. Now just as the denotative and connotative understandings of *Paramatma* can be synthesized—for as we have previously remarked, the divine Essence and the Creator are not two separate Gods—so the Neoplatonic philosophers and Aquinas intuited that Plato’s Beyond-Being and Aristotle’s God as highest *ens* (entity) could be reconciled. For Aquinas, this reconciliation is in certain respects articulated in the proposition: “In God, Existence and Essence are the same”; this is the title of *Summa contra gentiles* I:22, from which we here quote:

⁵ Frithjof Schuon writes that the phrase *Allahu akbar* “shows itself to be a kind of paraphrase of the *Shahadah*.” See Frithjof Schuon, *Understanding Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1994), 69.

If then the divine essence is something else than its own existence, it follows that essence and existence in God stand to one another as potentiality and actuality. But it has been shown that in God there is nothing of potentiality, but that he is pure actuality. Therefore God's essence is not anything else but his existence.

That "in God existence and essence are the same" follows from the truth that "God is his own essence" (*Summa contra gentiles* I:21). For Aquinas, the synthesis of Platonic divine Beyond-Being and Aristotelian divine superlative "existence" or Being is encapsulated in the term *Ipsium Esse*, according to which God is Being Itself. When Aquinas specifies that God is pure actuality, this applies to the divine Essence, and therefore presents no contradiction to the reality of the divine hypostases, which though *sensu stricto* are pure actuality, nevertheless represent a sort of divine "potentiality," viewed from without; but viewed from within, the hypostases occur in "eternal" mode, outside of temporality (cf. *Sirach* 24 where Lady Wisdom says, "The Lord created me from eternity, before the beginning"); moreover, literal potentiality in God would reduce the Creator to the ontological status of the creature, which would be intrinsic heresy.

When the Sufis say that in *fana* (mystical extinction of the illusory ego) God knows Himself by Himself in the heart of the faithful, the preposition 'in' must be understood as metaphorical with reference to the Unmanifest divine Essence. Greco-Roman philosophy in general establishes that the categories of *tempus* and *locus* cannot apply to God, for God cannot be confined within the boundaries of what is manifestly contingent and limited. Prepositions and other parts of speech which signify temporality and locality cannot apply to God in the literal sense, if by God we understand the divine Essence (this brings us back to the limitative aspects of the Sanskrit affix *para*). As a consequence, when the Qur'an proclaims that "God is the First and the Last" (= *tempus*) and "the Outward and the Inward" (= *locus*), these divine Names function as metaphorical attributes of the divine Essence; yet with reference to the Creator, the God of Revelation (the revealed God), these Names are properly analogical. Scholastic theology specifies two types of analogy,

namely, proper analogy and improper analogy, the latter being the metaphor. Analogy and metaphor can be compared fruitfully with the relationship obtaining between intrinsic symbol and extrinsic sign; the former participates in the reality which it reflects, whereas the latter constitutes merely an outward signification of a particular reality. A symbol is such by its very nature; a sign is such by some convention. Temporal and spatial attributes can therefore function as metaphors of the divine Essence and as analogies of the God of Revelation.

Place and time can be further applied to God analogically, for through Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of the First Relativity (= *Maya*) in *divinis*, a continuity is established between the divine Essence and the creation (and this "continuity" is none other than the Creator God). If God were not the highest *ens*, there would be, in Islamic terms, no likeness or similarity (*tashbih*) to God in the cosmos; yet through the Reality of *Ipsum Esse*, that is, of *epekein tes ousias*, dissimilarity (*tanzih*) is maintained between God and cosmic manifestation. Admittedly, the doctrine of relativity in *divinis*, as historically formulated, does not explicitly resolve all the obvious tensions between the opposition of the Absolute and the relative. Certainly no Hindu thinker would confuse the pair and identify the Absolute with the relative, or vice versa.

The Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being accentuates the truth that in a certain sense "Nothing but God *is*." Yet the relative existence that beings possess must subsist in a line of continuity with Being (divine Being), otherwise, as we have more than once specified, *beings* would not *be* at all. And it is precisely at this point that the Sufi doctrine of the Unity of Being overlaps with the Scholastic doctrine of the Analogy of Being, or the analogical predication of Being, that is, on account of the creature's source and origin in the Creator, who ultimately is *Ipsum Esse*, the being of contingent beings can be understood with reference to Being Itself (though identity of the two is by no means posited); finally, analogical predication implies that the creature's relationship with and closeness to God is ineffably intimate. As Aquinas writes in *Summa theologiae* Ia q. 8 a. 1 co.: "But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything

found in a thing, as was shown above (7, 1). Hence it must be that God is in all things, and most intimately.” (*Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*). In Qur’anic terms: “We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (50:16). Analogical predication arguably can connote the possibility that the First Relativity occurs *in divinis*, for this possibility is opened up by certain implications of Aquinas’ synthesis of *esse* and *ens*, of being and existence (or entification). Therefore, it is possible that the doctrine of divine relativity can be integrated, admittedly *in obliquo*, within the Thomistic framework.⁶

In conclusion, we must offer a necessary qualification of the phrase “occurs *in divinis*.” None of these three terms can be understood literally or concretely. There can be no action in relation to God, for action implies *tempus* (succession of events), and this cancels out the verb “occurs.” Equally, there can be no *locus* with relation to God, and this cancels out the second of the words, namely, the preposition ‘in’. Finally, since according to the apophatic approach God can in Essence only be described through the *via negativa*, even the word *divinis* must be canceled out. Naturally one could conceivably accentuate the dimension of *tashbih* in these contexts, but not in a sense that would literally or categorically contradict the truth of *tanzih*.

⁶ Frithjof Schuon writes that even though they do not draw all the logical conclusions from the matter, nevertheless, “according to the Scholastics, Divine Reality is neither purely absolute nor purely relative, but contains *formaliter eminenter* both absoluteness and relativity. . . .” Frithjof Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1994), 55.

archegos

7. Some Notes on the *Ruh* and the *Amr* – Spirit and Word

Sura *al-Qadr* refers to “the fullness of the *Amr*,” that is, of the Word, Arabic *Amr* being cognate with Aramaic *Memra*, the precise equivalent of the Greek word *Logos*. But in Arabic, this *Amr*, the Word, carries the accentuation, or the particular “verbal” semantic implication, of “command.” Now the principal Word (*Kalima*) is precisely an imperative Word of Command, namely, the divine creative ‘Be!’ In the phrase “And God said,” repeated ten times in the *Genesis* creation account, the word for “said” is the Hebrew ‘*mr*, ‘to say’, which is a Word of command or decree. Sura *Bani Israil* 85-86: “The *Ruh* pertains to the *Amr* (Word) of my Lord.”¹ The Spirit pertains to the Word, the *Logos*, the creative command of cosmic manifestation. Note that the *Ruh* and *Amr* also appear together in sura *al-Qadr*, as quoted at the opening of the present paragraph. There the *Ruh* brings to the world the *Amr* in all its fullness, the pleromatic *Logos*. The angels are mentioned along with the *Ruh* in sura *al-Qadr* because they are precisely emanations of the *Ruh*.

In sura 40:15, the word *Amr* appears with the same meaning as *Logos*: “The Exalter of Ranks, the Lord of the Throne. He casteth the Spirit of His Word [*Amr*] upon whom He will of His

¹ “The Spirit pertains to the Word.” Compare Frithjof Schuon’s statement: “In the beginning was the Spirit: hence the Word; for the Spirit . . . brings about the manifestation of Its innumerable possibilities.” Frithjof Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human. Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology*. Trans. By Gustavo Polit and Deborah Lambert (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1982), 17. Schuon also understands the *Amr* as a hypostasis: “The Spirit is by command of my Lord’ (by radiation or hypostatic prolongation). . . .” See Frithjof Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1994), 35.

slaves, that He may warn of the Day of Meeting.” And similarly we read in sura 42:52-53:

And thus have We inspired in thee a Spirit of Our Word [*Amr*]. Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a Light whereby We guide whom We will of our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path. The path of Allah, unto Whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Do not all things reach Allah at last?²

The Isma’ili mystic Abu Ya’qub Ishaq ibn Ahmad as-Sijisi (as-Sijistani), who was martyred in 331 AH, identifies the *Amr* of God with the Word (*Kalima*) of God. Sami N. Makarem encapsulates as-Sijistani’s doctrine of *Amr* as *Kalima* as follows: “Abu Ya’qub Ishaq as-Sijistani in his epistle *Tuhfat al-mustajibin* says that Divine Will (*al-amr*) was the first and only thing to issue out of God. It is also called . . . Word (*al-kalima*). . . . This *Amr* . . . is the source of creation.”³

In this context we should mention the famous Johannine colon, an interpolation to the *First Epistle of John*: “And there are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one.” This colon, which is not a part of the sacred text, is nevertheless “inspired” as a deutero-liturgical statement, or “secondary” theological utter-

² Equipped with the correct philology of *amr*, we can now see certain correspondences in aya 52 between “Spirit” and “Word” on the one hand, and “Scripture” and “Faith” on the other. The inspiration of the Spirit gives rise to the Word, which encompasses the Scripture, and which in turn is the source of Faith.

³ Sami N. Makarem, “The Philosophical Significance of the Imam in Isma’ilism,” *Studia Islamica*, 27 (1967), 42. The same essay explains that according to the Isma’ilis, the Imam is the Word of God. Makarem gives the following hadith of Imam ‘Ali: “I am the Will [*Amr*] of God, ‘He makes the spirit (*ruh*) from His will [*Amr*] descend upon any of His servants to whom He pleases to send it’ (Sura XL 15).” Makarem’s translation should be emended somewhat; *Amr* is primarily Word, secondarily Will, so that ‘Ali is explicitly identifying himself as the Logos of God: “I am the Word of God, ‘He makes the Spirit of His Word descend upon any of His servants to whom He pleases to send It.”

ance. According to Islamic Peripatetic philosophy, the Sacred Father is the Tenth Intelligence, which coincides with the Logos as such, albeit in refracted mode; the Father is also called the Holy Spirit in the same speculative philosophy. Thus the Father, Word, and Spirit all refer to the Logos of God; precisely as the medieval Johannine colon declares: "And these three are one"; or in Qur'anic terminology: "The Spirit pertains to the Word."

The Tenth Intelligence, the Active Intelligence, known as the Father of Forms, is the tenth emanational Intelligence; but the ten emanational Intelligences are not in essence separate "entities," for there is only One Intelligence, the Pure Intellect, the Logos. That the Tenth Intelligence is not a separate Intelligence from the First Intellect—emanation chiefly implies not separate identity, but a "separate" function, aspect, mode, or dimension—is indicated by the fact that it is in Islamic philosophy denominated as the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit.

To review a few of our philological observations, the Aramaic term *Memra*, 'Word', directly cognate with Arabic *Amr*, appears in the Jewish Aramaic *targumim*, roughly overlapping temporally with the emergence of the Qur'an, as a divine hypostasis and reverential "evasive" synonym for YHWH and *ha Shem* (the Name = the Lord). Sura *al-Qadr* aya 4 declares concerning the "Night of Majesty" (*qadr* here denotes 'majesty', 'glory', 'honor', and only in a secondary sense does it connote 'power' or 'destiny'): "Therein descend the Angels and the Spirit, with leave of their Lord, with the fullness (*kul*) of the *Amr*." In this aya, *kul* functions as a noun, and not being adjectivally descriptive but substantive in nature, it must be rendered as "fullness," and corresponds to Hebrew *kol* and Greek *pleroma*.⁴ *Amr* denotes "Word"; therefore, by divine decree, the angels and the Spirit descend "in" the "Night of Majesty" with "the pleroma of the

⁴ In the Kabbalah the Hebrew term *ba-kol*, "in everything," denotes the hypostatized feminine *Shekhinah*'s immanent presence in the world; see Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead. Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 171. Moreover, "the Shekhinah is called *kalah ha-keulah min ha-kol*, 'the bride incorporated from everything'" (ibid., 172). The Hebrew *kalal* is cognate with "crown," "bride," and "all" (ibid.).

Logos.”⁵ According to Shi’ite gnosis, the “Night” in sura *al-Qadr* is the Lady of Light, Fatima, who is the *Umm al-Kitab*, Mother of the Book. When at this point we review the above philological observations and view them synoptically, we obtain the following surprising picture: In the Night of Glory, the angels and the Spirit descend with the fullness of the Logos; on the Night of the Nativity of Christ the Word, St. Luke informs us that “an Angel of the Lord” (who must be Gabriel, who is assimilated to the Spirit in Islamic theology) was accompanied by a host of angels who sang: “Glory [= *qadr* in Arabic] to God in the highest . . .” (*Luke* 2:9, 13-14). Thus sura *al-Qadr* operates on two levels simultaneously; first, the subject is the descent of the Qur’an in the Night of Glory. The Night is essentially the *Umm al-Kitab*, and as Fatima is an earthly manifestation of this Mother of the Book (Book = Logos), so is the Virgin Maryam an earthly manifestation of the celestial Mother of the Book, who gave birth to the Logos on the night the angels sing “Glory.” Therefore, the second sense of sura *al-Qadr* is that in the Night of Glory, the Night of the Nativity of Christ the Logos, the Spirit (the Angel of the Lord) and the angels descend; they descend in the Night, that is, they descend in Mary, with the *pleroma* of the Logos.

The secondary lexical meaning of Arabic *Amras* ‘command’ could by extension be understood as “Word of Command,” in order to join the primary and secondary senses. The reason that *amr* in Qur’anic Arabic possesses the nuance of ‘command’ is that, as we have pointed out, in the Qur’an the “principal” Word (*Kalima*) is precisely a command, the Word of Command, “Be!” (*kun*). This is the creative Word, and its use in the Qur’an corresponds to the *Genesis* text’s *Fiat lux*!—“Let there be light,” or “Light, be!” This refers not to the light of the sun, but to the preexistent primordial light, that is, to the Logos, or in Islamic terms, to the *Nur Muhammadi*. The primordial light of *Genesis* is interpreted as the Messiah in Jewish Kabbalism, and in *John* 1:4 and *2 Corinthians* 4:6 the primordial light of *Genesis*’ creation account is interpreted as the Logos and as Christ respectively.

⁵ See Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus. Die christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans neu übersetzt und erklärt* (Wien, Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1978), 114-15.

To return to the subject of the *Umm al-Kitab*, we cite sura 43:1-3: "1. By the *Kitab* that makes clear, 2. We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand. 3. And verily, it is in the *Umm al-Kitab*, with Us, transcendent, Wise." In ayat 1-2, the elements "make clear" and "understand" allude to the fact that the *Kitab* corresponds to the Logos (cf. 'Word', 'reason', 'mind', 'logic'). According to aya 3, "it," the *Kitab*, "is in the *Umm al-Kitab*," just as the Spirit in sura *al-Qadr* brings the *Kitab* "in" the virginal Night, who is the *Umm al-Kitab* on the earthly plane. It is perfectly "logical" that the *Kitab* dwells "in" its own Mother. In aya 3, God specifies that the *Umm al-Kitab* is "with Us." The *Umm al-Kitab* corresponds to the hypostasis known as Lady Wisdom in the Jewish scriptures. Qur'an 43:3 describes the *Umm al-Kitab* as "transcendent, Wise." She is transcendent, for she is celestial, and since "Wise" is a typical and frequent Qur'anic Name of God, to say that the Mother of the Book is Wise denotes that she is the very plenitude of divine Wisdom, and consequently she is Wisdom as such. In agreement with aya 3, specifying that the *Umm al-Kitab* is "with God" ("with Us"), Lady Wisdom states in *Proverbs* 8:30: "I was *with him* forming all things. . . ." Aya 3 can be alternatively rendered as "We possess the *Umm al-Kitab*." With this, compare Lady Wisdom's utterance in *Proverbs* 8:22: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways. . . ." According to the Aramaic *targumim*, in *Genesis* 1:1, "In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," the word "Beginning" denotes Wisdom, and the Aramaic text therefore reads: "In Wisdom, God created the heavens and the earth," that is, in Lady Wisdom, who was "with him forming all things" (*Proverbs* 8:30).

The *Umm al-Kitab*, who corresponds to Lady Wisdom, is "with Us" (with God); this recalls *John* 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with God*. . . ." By analogy we would maintain that just as in Christian theology the "dwelling" or "being" of the Word with God denotes a hypostatic relationship, so in Qur'an 43:3, the statement that the *Umm al-Kitab*, transcendent and Wise (= Wisdom as such), is "with God" similarly denotes a "hypostatic" relationship with God. (The divine aspect of this Wisdom is indicated by its "transcendent" nature). We may reformulate the message of sura 43:3 as follows: "The

Mother of the Logos is with God." And "in the Beginning (= in Wisdom, or in the *Umm al-Kitab*) was the Word, and the Word (who proceeds from Wisdom) was with God. . . ." The following phrase denotes the hypostatic nature of this "dwelling" with God: "and the Word (which proceeds from Wisdom) was God." In fact, a metaphysical approach finds an equivalent teaching in sura 6:73-74: "He it is who *created* the heavens and the earth in *Truth*. In that Day, when He saith, Be! it is. His *Word is the Truth*. . . . Knower of the invisible and the visible, He is the Wise, the Aware." Here it is explicitly stated that God creates by means of the Word (= Logos), for his Truth through which he creates is specified to be his Word.

The statement that a divine hypostasis, namely, Wisdom (= *Umm al-Kitab*) is "with" God, that is, dwells with God, already suggests a metaphysical truth which at the exoteric level of Islamic *kalam* might be censured as *shirk*, that is, "association with God." This censure, to be sure, can in a sense be supported by certain Qur'anic ayat in which it is explained that no one was with God to help him in creating the heavens and the earth. But the Jewish scriptures, as thoroughly monotheistic as the Qur'an, teach that Lady Wisdom was "with" God during the creation, assisting the divine Artificer. Lady Wisdom speaks in *Proverbs* 8:27: "When he prepared the heavens, I was present"; verse 30: "I was with him forming all things." According to *Sirach* 24:6, Wisdom proclaims that she was the means by which the primordial light (the Logos) of *Genesis* was made: "I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth." The Light (Logos) derives from Wisdom, which once again gives us the figure of the *Umm al-Kitab*. And metaphysically, despite the reservations of *kalam*, sura 43:3 corresponds in essence to the claim of Lady Wisdom in *Proverbs* 8:27, 30 that she was "with" God during creation. Therefore the Jewish *targumim* of *Genesis* 1:1 declare: "In Wisdom, God created the heavens and the earth," that is, in Lady Wisdom. This is alluded to metaphysically in the Qur'an where it is repeatedly stressed that God created by means of his *Word*, freely admitting all valid divergences between the Christian and Islamic formal contents and articulations of revelation.

The resolution of the problem of *shirk* in this context is that the divine Attribute of Wisdom, like all the divine Attributes, is

not other than God, as the classical Islamic creeds specify. The tendency of some authorities, especially among Shi'ites, to categorize God's Speech or Word as an act of creation rather than a divine Attribute⁶ has at least two motivations; first is a polemic concern to combat the Christian doctrine of the Logos as uncreated, and second is the theological fact that the uncreated Word of God, the eternal Qur'an, is clothed on the earthly plane in the created and temporal words of Arabic.

According to *Proverbs* 8:24, Lady Wisdom was "conceived" by God; *Sirach* 24:5 calls Wisdom "the firstborn before all creatures." *Wisdom* 7:25 describes her as "a certain pure emanation of the glory of the almighty God." The fact that these same passages state that Lady Wisdom was "created" (in an eternal modality) indicates that she is a divine hypostasis, and thus is not to be identified with God as such, strictly speaking. This "created" aspect does not, however, contradict the fact that the divine Attributes are not other than God, for the Attributes apply on the relational level to the realm of cosmic manifestation, that is, to creation. *Sirach* 24:14: "From the beginning, and before the world, was I created. . . ." How was Lady Wisdom "created"? *Sirach* 24:5: "I came out of the *mouth* of the most high, the firstborn before all creatures." The divine mouth implies the divine Breath (= Spirit) before the Word; Lady Wisdom is the divine Breath, that is, the Holy Spirit. Yet "mouth" implies secondarily Word; thus the Qur'an specifies that in relation to the created status of Jesus Christ, "When God ordains a matter, He says to it only, Be! and it is" (sura 40:68). "Lo! the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then he said unto him: Be! and he is" (sura 3:59). When we examine the Jewish scriptures pertaining to Lady Wisdom, it becomes apparent that in Hebrew the concepts of "generation" (in eternal mode) and "creation" of Lady Wisdom are used essentially with equivalent meanings. And one should recall that the original sense of the term "son of God" in the Bible functions as a metaphor for "enthronement." When the Israelite king was

⁶ For instance, see the discussion of divine attributes in Haji Mirza Mehdi Pooya, *Fundamentals of Islam* (Karachi, Pakistan: Pakistan Herald Press, 1972), 10-12.

ceremoniously enthroned and crowned, he was metaphorically proclaimed “son of God,” and was said to have been “begotten by God.” *Psalms* 109/110:3 is addressed on the historical plane to the king of Israel: “With thee is the principality in the day of thy strength. . . . From the womb before the daystar I begot thee.” Similarly, another Messianic (that is, “anointed” for “kingship”) Psalm reads: “The Lord hath said to me: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee” (*Psalms* 2:7). And Jesus’ status as “son of God” in the New Testament, in its original sense, agrees basically with the Old Testament Jewish usage. *Romans* 1:4: “Who was designated the Son of God in power . . . by the resurrection. . . .” *Acts* 13:33 applies the fulfillment of *Psalms* 2:7 to the resurrection of Jesus, when he became the “son” of God: “. . . raising up Jesus, as it is written . . . : Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”

The original Jewish and Christian concept of “son of God” is thus metaphorical and perfectly monotheistic. Yet this language could not have been integrated in an orthodox sense by the polytheistic Arabians of Muhammad’s time, so deeply ingrained in them was the notion of the quasi-physical nature of God having male and female offspring. “God neither begets nor is he begotten” (sura 112:3). In the sense referred to here in the Qur’an, no right-minded Jew or Christian has ever believed that God begets. “Beget” as applied to God in Jewish and Christian theology is a strict metaphor, and often even its metaphysical import has been assimilated into Islamic and Christian philosophy, namely, in the doctrine of the divine eternal emanations, a doctrine also fully present in the Jewish *Zohar*. The *Zohar* and Christian philosophy preserve the metaphorical language regarding God “begetting” emanations; such language is providentially censured in Islam; in the latter, the philosophers certainly speak approvingly of emanations, but not as having been “begotten” by God. Thus, whereas the Bible speaks of God begetting the Word, the Qur’an uses the equivalent language of God “speaking” the Word; for Judaism, too, God “begets” by speaking. Thus Lady Wisdom was begotten through proceeding from the mouth of God (*Sirach* 24:5).

There is a certain degree of concordance between the Christian concept of the eternal generation of the Word and

various Islamic doctrines on the eternity and divinity of the divine Attributes, with the important distinction that in Islamic *kalam* the Attributes are not in the strict sense personal or hypostatic. Yet an opening to the hypostatic understanding of the divine Attributes is contained in various modes and degrees in Islamic speculative philosophy on the divine emanations; especially to be noted in this context are the similarities which obtain between the Christian understanding of the eternal Logos and the Sufi concept of the *Nur Muhammadi*; on the Shi'ite side we should mention the doctrine of the "eternal" Imam, coinciding with the Sufi idea of the Perfect Man. We will note in this latter context that it is esoterically implied that the Prophet and other members of the *Ahlul Bayt* are assimilated to the "divine" plane as hypostases by the teaching which maintains that the five names of the members of the Prophet's Household are inscribed, from "pre-eternity," upon the divine Throne.

Though in the end Islam and the Church must providentially remain separate, and though by no means can all theological tension between the two faiths be resolved, nevertheless, at the esoteric level, the metaphysician has the right and duty to penetrate beyond the level of the exoteric in the attempt to understand "the way things really are." We can do no better than to end with the following comment from Frithjof Schuon: "... on the principal plane, there are no unsolvable questions, for all that 'is' can in principle be known. . . ."⁷

⁷ Frithjof Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute*, 37.

PART II



'ISA AND MARYAM
(JESUS AND MARY)

8. The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm

It is well known among biblical scholars and theologians that the *Gospel of John* chapter 20:22, in portraying Christ as giving the Spirit to his apostles on “resurrection Sunday” compresses the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost Day into a single sacred event. The Johannine utterance, “he breathed on them; and he said to them: receive ye the Holy Spirit,” receives the following note in the Catholic *New American Bible*: “This is the author’s version of Pentecost.” Actually it is not that John “compresses” events that were originally distinct; on the contrary, it is the synoptic gospels which take an essentially multifaceted yet unitary event and segment and project it out onto several “historical” layers. Even *John* 20 itself, in contrast to the main body of the same gospel, reflects this process of segmentation in that it “spatially” and temporally separates Good Friday from the resurrection-ascension by three days. Throughout John, at least until the second section of the passion narrative, the crucifixion is inseparable from the glorification, or ascension, of Jesus. *John* 12:32: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.” The lifting up on the cross is the ascent to God, which effects, in eternity, the *apocatastasis*, or the Qur’anic universal Return, *al-Ruj’ah*. The Johannine passion narrative, at least until chapter 19:30, in contrast to the remainder of the text, agrees with the overall trajectory of the gospel and “compresses” the crucifixion and “Pentecost.” *John* 19:30’s statement regarding Jesus on the cross, “And bowing his head, he handed over the Spirit” is curiously phrased. Theologians largely agree that this at the very least is intended in a double sense which includes an allusion to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which Luke “localizes” on Pentecost. But this historicizing element that delays the outpouring of the Spirit until Pentecost is utterly unknown

and alien to John. *John* 19:30 presents Good Friday and the outpouring of the Spirit as the same event; John says nothing of a pneumatic significance relating to Pentecost, this lying, providentially, outside his theological field of vision and concern. In having Jesus hand over the Holy Spirit, a direct reference to Jesus' death is avoided in the Johannine passion verse under consideration. The cross was essentially not the death of Christ, but his return to God, his ascension. Thus, in agreement with the Qur'an, Christ experiences a "deathless" transition to God: "... They slew him not for certain. . . . But God took him up unto Himself" (sura 4:157-58). His lifting up on the cross is his ascent to God. In "handing over the Spirit," what the synoptic gospels see as Jesus' death with reference to his personal "spirit," John portrays as the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (the "equivalent" of Luke's Pentecost), which originally is a Good Friday event. This is the culminating point of the Johannine paradigm of Jesus' crucifixion as his ascension to God.

That the Spirit was poured out on Good Friday, that the cross was not in an absolute sense Jesus' death but his ascent to God, was the original *kerygma* of the Jewish Christians, as recorded in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*: "After they had raised him up on the cross, the Father took him up into heaven unto himself" (M. R. James translation). The *Gospel of Peter* informs us: "And the Lord cried out aloud saying: 'My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me.' And when he had so said, he was taken up." The text of the *Acts of John* gives the title of "Resurrection" to the cross itself. *Odes of Solomon* 22 portrays Christ's triumph on the cross as occurring at one and the same time in hell and in heaven; this must mean that the cross and resurrection are viewed, from a transcendent perspective, as one and the same triumphal event. Lest one disregard "apocryphal" sources, we note that the equivalency of cross and ascension is supported by more than one New Testament verse, both implicitly and explicitly. The *Letter to the Hebrews* 10:12 states of Jesus, that "when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God." *Colossians* 2:15 places the triumph of Christ at the cross, not three days later. The historicizations separating Good Friday and the resurrection by three days, and the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit by forty days,

were originally not intended to be taken literally in a strictly or limiting historical sense, but were formulated by employing transparently symbolic numbers based on well known Hebrew scriptural antecedents.

In the *Gospel of John* there is also a “compression” of “Pentecost” and the eschatological *parousia* of Christ (see chapters 14 and 16), so that we may also join, *sub specie aeternitatis*, Good Friday with the *parousia*. Good Friday was in a sense, specifically from the viewpoint of realized eschatology, the end of the world. This explains why *Matthew* 27:53 in its original text, places the resurrection of the dead—an undeniably eschatological event—at the foot of the cross. This fulfilled Jesus’ words in *John* 5:25: “Amen, amen I say unto you, that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” That this refers to the eschatological general resurrection of the righteous as well as unrighteous is demonstrated by verse 29: “And they that have done good things, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” Therefore, Good Friday with its resurrection of the dead, viewed from the present accentuation, ushers in the *eschaton*. In agreement with the atmosphere of apocalyptic upheavals and transformations associated with Good Friday in *Matthew* 27, a Jewish-Christian gospel (the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*) records, in M. R. James’ translation: “‘Father forgive them’: at this word of the Lord many thousands of Jews that stood round about the Cross believed.”¹

Having noted that the gospel authors subsequently divided, for the sake of sacred symbolism, the single (but multifaceted) reality of Good Friday into several separate events,² we are left

¹ Maria de Àgreda in her *Mystical City of God* writes concerning the day of Pentecost: “Those that were converted by the first sermon of Saint Peter, were to a great extent of the number of those who, by their compassion and sorrow at the death of the Lord, had merited for themselves such a great blessing.” De Àgreda thus in her own manner “compresses” Good Friday and Pentecost, revealing their essential inseparability.

² This is to say that the “events” are separate in only a symbolic sense. The “events” are actually various aspects of a single event, or sacred reality, which constitutes an atemporal singularity participating in history.

with the enigma of the early Christian traditions which assimilated the transfiguration upon Mount Tabor to the ascension of Christ. The ending of the *Apocalypse of Peter* portrays the transfiguration of Jesus as his glorification through ascension into heaven.³ Similarly in *2 Peter* 1:16-18, where we would expect a reference to the resurrection (or “post”-resurrection appearances of Christ), we find instead a narration of the transfiguration as the central defining miraculous event witnessed by the apostles and offered by them to the world as evidence of the Christian faith’s authenticity. Though only implicitly so, it is nevertheless clearly apparent that *2 Peter*, in agreement with the *Apocalypse of Peter*, views the transfiguration as the resurrection-ascension, so that this theological idea possesses not merely apocryphal (= esoteric) witnesses, but is also of canonical status. But if, as we noted earlier, the transfiguration is ultimately inseparable from Good Friday’s multifaceted “singularity” (we use the term as employed in physics, in an analogous sense of course; singularity may be represented by the mathematical integral symbol \int), which finally embraces even Christ’s eschatological *parousia*, then the transfiguration ultimately implies the *parousia* itself. This claim receives confirmation from the synoptic accounts of the transfiguration. *Mark*’s narration of this occurrence (9:1-9) is introduced at chapter 8:38-39; verse 38 refers to the *parousia* when “the Son of man . . . shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Verse 39 then gives us Jesus’ solemn assurance: “Amen I say to you, that there are some of them that stand here, who shall not taste death, till they see the kingdom of God coming in power.” *Mark*’s account is paralleled in *Matthew* 16:27-17:9, and *Luke* 9:26-36. That the transfiguration is the fulfillment of this *parousia* promise is an inescapable conclusion, and this was recognized as early as Origen, and before him already by *2 Peter* 1:16 which describes the transfiguration as “the power and *parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The inseparability of the transfiguration from the resurrection-ascension of Christ

³ We supply at the end of this essay the full account of the transfiguration from the *Apocalypse of Peter*, according to the traditional M. R. James translation, though slightly modified for clarity.

is also borne out by the divine declaration of Jesus' sonship in the transfiguration accounts: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him" (*Matthew* 17:5 and parallels). Reflecting the earliest Jewish-Christian *kerygma*, Paul specifies in *Romans* 1:4 that Jesus' sonship (which is a metaphor denoting "enthronement") begins with the resurrection-ascension.

Paul identifies Christ's resurrection with his ascension, that is, his enthronement. Like John, Paul knows nothing of Luke's historicization of a forty-day period separating the resurrection and ascension. For John and Paul, the resurrection is the ascension. *Acts* 13:33 also specifies that Jesus' sonship commences with the resurrection: "This same, God hath fulfilled to our children, raising up Jesus, as in the second psalm also is written: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The declaration of sonship in the transfiguration accounts agrees with the paradigm of *Romans* 1:4 and *Acts* 13:33, for the transfiguration account is by inference assimilated to the resurrection in *2 Peter* 1:16-18. In the Christian scriptures, there is no divine declaration of Jesus' sonship with reference to his virginal conception or virgin birth, for in the Jewish sphere of scripture "sonship" denotes enthronement, and this, from at least one "temporal" perspective, commences with Jesus' resurrection-ascension.

It is true that various apocryphal texts as well as variant readings of the canonical gospels record a divine declaration of sonship at Jesus' baptism. If we accept this tradition, and we see no reason to exclude it from consideration as a sacred tradition, we can view it as a proleptic announcement of the sonship which begins with the enthronement effected by the resurrection-ascension. The justification for the proleptic declaration would be the traditional resurrection symbolism of baptism. According to Paul in *Romans* 6 and elsewhere, when one rises from the baptismal water, one is risen with Christ from death and seated, that is, enthroned, in celestial realms. Thus baptism functions as a symbol of death and resurrection, and therefore of enthronement. In accord with this symbolism, the late first-century Syriac *Ode of Solomon* 24 represents the baptism of Jesus as an apocalyptic event entailing cosmic destruction and renewal:

- 1 The Dove fluttered over the Messiah, because he was her head;
- 2 And she sang over him and her voice was heard:
- 3 And the inhabitants were afraid and the sojourners were moved:
- 4 The birds dropped their wings and all creeping things died in their holes:
- 5 And the abysses were opened and closed; and they cried to the Lord like women in travail:
- 6 And no food was given to them by him, because he did not belong to them;
- 7 And they sealed up the abysses with the seal of the Lord. And they perished in the thought they had existed in from ancient times;
- 8 For they were in labor from the beginning; and the end of their travail was life:
- 9 And every one of them that was imperfect perished: for it was not possible to give them a word that they might remain:
- 10 And the Lord destroyed the imaginations of all them that had not the truth with them.
- 11 For they who in their hearts were lifted up were deficient in wisdom,
- 12 And so they were rejected, because the truth was not with them.
- 13 For the Lord disclosed his way and spread abroad his grace:
- 14 And those who understood it, know his holiness. Hallelujah.

The symbolism of sonship as it relates to Jesus derives ultimately from the so-called “enthronement” Psalms. Scholarship has recognized that when a king was enthroned in ancient Israel, he was understood as having been enthroned by God, and this enthronement was metaphorically called divine sonship. The king was analogically denominated “*elohim*” (God) by virtue of the enthronement ceremony, during which the liturgical enthronement *Psalms* (e.g., *Psalms* 2, 109/110, etc.) were ritually chanted.

To summarize our argumentation up to this point: The Good Friday singularity simultaneously and instantaneously embraces what later came to be portrayed as “separate” events of crucifixion, transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Spirit, and *parousia*. These were originally not considered separate events in an absolute sense, but separate aspects or modes of the Good Friday singularity.⁴

The overall paradigm established by our introductory explorations will assist us in integrating into our field of vision the Marian dimension/s of these same realities. *Acts* 1:14, which pictures Mary as praying among Christ’s followers, is the last Christian scriptural mention of the Virgin on the historical plane. She vanishes from the world just before Pentecost. This is because, metaphysically considered, Pentecost was the revelation to the world of the Marian manifestation of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit in Marian mode.⁵ Between *Acts* 1:14 and 2:1, Mary was transfigured and through ascent exited the terrestrial sphere. She descended on Pentecost as the Marian Spirit, which is to say, again, that the Spirit descended in Marian mode.⁶ Again

⁴ The reader must bear in mind that in our reflections concerning Good Friday, the resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, and in what will follow regarding the assumption of Mary, we have not attempted an historical reconstruction of events. We are more interested in explicating the sacred significance of the theological symbols under consideration. Symbols and myths may at times be more effective channels of truth than the mere narration of historical events. On this last point, see the comments of Frithjof Schuon, *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*. Translated from the French by G. E. H. Palmer. (Pates Manor, Bedford, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1990), 18-22. On page 20 of this work, Schuon remarks: “Historical reality is less ‘real’ than the profound truth it expresses and which myths likewise express; a mythological symbolism is infinitely more ‘true’ than a fact deprived of symbolism.”

⁵ If we recall that Christ spoke a Semitic tongue, in which the word “spirit” is grammatically feminine, then verses from the Christian scriptures concerning the Spirit may be illuminated if we change the Greek masculine or neuter pronouns referring to the Spirit to the appropriate feminine pronoun, “she.” We may then see that several such verses could apply in an analogical sense to the glorified, transfigured Virgin Mary. The analogical application may be in either a direct or indirect sense.

⁶ The qualifying word “mode” indicates that there is to be no confusion of “persons” in this context; Mary cannot be identified simplistically or exhaus-

we stress that this applies to a way of looking at things *sub specie aeternitatis*, and not to a strictly historical mode of narration, so that there is no question here of denying the various traditions of Mary's assumption at an advanced age in Ephesus.⁷

The Divine Wisdom, Sophia, which preexisted as Lady Wisdom before the creation of the universe (*Proverbs* 8, *Sirach* 24, *Wisdom* 7), manifested herself on the earthly plane in history as the Virgin Mary. St. Maximilian Kolbe wrote with reference

tively with the Holy Spirit. But as we will explore below, scripture, according to a traditional allegorical model, portrays the ascension of Christ and the assumption of Mary as a single transcendent event, implying also a single "temporal locus" for the occurrence. The assumption of Mary is a simultaneous and instantaneous ascent and descent. To paraphrase scripture (*Ephesians* 5:10), "She who descended is the same who ascended." If, as in the *Gospel of John*, crucifixion can be viewed as glorification, then certainly both ascent and descent can be considered as a simultaneous and instantaneous event.

⁷ Maria de Àgreda writes in her *Mystical City of God*, Part III, The Coronation, Book VIII, Chapter 1, that on Pentecost, "the invisible gifts of the Holy Ghost appeared in visible form." This "visibility" coincides at some point with the transfiguration of Mary as the Pentecostal Paraclete. Maria de Àgreda writes—admittedly in occasionally exaggerated devotional language—of Mary in relation to Pentecost as follows, intimating an inseparable link in the mysteries of Mary and the Spirit: "In the most holy Mary these effects were altogether divine, and most wonderful in the sight of all the heavenly courtiers; for as regards us men, we are incapable of understanding and explaining them. The purest Lady was transformed and exalted in God; for She saw intuitively and clearly the Holy Ghost, and for a short time enjoyed the beatific vision of the Divinity. Of his gifts and divine influences She by Herself received more than all the rest of the saints. Her glory for that space of time, exceeded that of the angels and of the blessed. She alone gave to the Lord more glory, praise and thanksgiving than all the universe for the benefit of the descent of his Holy Spirit upon his Church and for his having pledged Himself so many times to send Him and through Him to govern it to the end of the world. The blessed Trinity was so pleased with the conduct of Mary on this occasion, that It considered Itself fully repaid and compensated for having created the world; and not only compensated, but God acted as if He were under a certain obligation for possessing such a peerless Creature, whom the Father could look upon as his Daughter, the Son as his Mother, and the Holy Ghost as his Spouse; and whom (according to our way of thinking) He was now obliged to visit and enrich after having conferred upon Her such high dignity. In this exalted and blessed Spouse were renewed all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, creating new effects and operations altogether beyond our capacity to understand."

to the Virgin that “*Spiritus Sanctus quasi incarnatus est.*”⁸ For our present purposes, we find connotative justification for the possibility of hypostatic union of Mary and Lady Wisdom in the implicit principles contained in Aquinas’ *Summa theologiae* 3, q. 3, a. 7, from which we offer the following excerpt:

Hence it may not be said that a Divine Person so assumed one human nature as to be unable to assume another. For it would seem to follow from this that the Person of the Divine Nature was so comprehended by one human nature as to be unable to assume another to its Person; and this is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature.

These observations imply that for Christian theology there is no reason why the mystery of hypostatic union must be restricted to Jesus and the Word. For Aquinas, the Word can be hypostatically united with persons other than Jesus. The connotation we draw from this is that the Holy Spirit can also hypostatically unite with human persons. And the Marian theological heritage of ancient Jewish Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy all imply, especially in their official Marian liturgies citing *Proverbs* 8 and *Sirach* 24, that at the very least Kolbe remains within the authentic fields of sacred tradition when he speaks of a “quasi” incarnation of

⁸ When one overlooks the political eccentricities of the work, the following monograph presents theological arguments in favor of a hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit with the Virgin Mary, the central thesis of which would seem difficult to refute from a Christian metaphysical perspective: Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987). A rather weak attack of Boff’s central thesis is found in George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 261-63. Tavard insists Boff’s idea of a hypostatic union of the Holy Spirit and Mary “must be rejected” out “of fidelity to the patristic and medieval tradition” (263), without, however, taking into account the esoteric sources in tradition that point precisely to such a possibility of hypostatic union between the Virgin and the Spirit. In the same work, Tavard curiously labels the ancient *Gospel of the Hebrews*, in which Christ refers to “My Mother the Holy Spirit” as a Gnostic rather than an early Jewish-Christian gospel (22-23).

Wisdom with reference to the Virgin. If the evidence cited above is taken at face value, then certainly one should not dismiss a priori the possibility of a hypostatic union of Wisdom with the holy Virgin. But since Mary and Christ are one, we would not necessarily be dealing with two hypostatic unions, but perhaps with a single union in dual mode,⁹ embracing male and female, reconstituting the sacred primordial Androgyne, according to the sense proposed in the authentic Kabbalah. It is by virtue of her union with Lady Wisdom that Mary is traditionally called the *sedes sapientiae*, the Seat, or Throne, of Wisdom. Yet there can be no simplistic identification of the Virgin Mary with the Divine Wisdom or Holy Spirit. Just as in Jesus the celestial and earthly natures were united and not confused or identical with each other, so the preexistent Sophia was united in non-identitative mode with the humanity of the historical person Mary. As Thomas Aquinas teaches that Jesus' humanity cannot exhaustively embrace the eternal Word, so the Virgin's human nature can in no way exhaustively "assimilate" the eternal Wisdom. We must insist upon this point, for from both an Islamic and Christian-Thomasian posture, to identify any human person simplistically with the divine is unacceptable. As long as the term "hypostatic union" is understood analogically as akin to "theophanic in-presencing,"¹⁰ or in scriptural language as "the descent of the Spirit," rather than in a sense that is literal (especially physical) and exhaustive, the model of hypostatic union can be reconciled to a certain extent with Qur'anic and Jewish scriptural paradigms when metaphysically understood. God's glory descended and dwelt in the temple of Solomon; in the same way, the Qur'an embodies (inlitrates) the divine Glory; in the Christian economy, the Word tabernacled in humanity

⁹ On the dual-unitive hypostatic union (the terminology is our own) of Mary and Jesus, see the list of various theologians, differing widely in quality, referred to in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What Is Good*. Translated by Angelo Scola and Maria Shradý (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 45-46.

¹⁰ The term "theophanic in-presencing" is our own, but it is inspired by the system of the great Sufi philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi.

and “we saw his glory” (*Gospel of John* 1:14).¹¹ Ultimately, when speaking of a sacred “mystery,” all language is limitative on account of its metaphorical, analogical, or symbolical nature. This is not to imply that human *ratio* cannot or should not aim at ever-increasing precision in the articulation of theological truths. But from the perspective of pure intellection, both formulations of “hypostatic union” and “theophanic in-presencing” are essentially “non-literal.”

According to this paradigm, to use Christian terminology, Jesus is hypostatically united with the Word, Mary with Wisdom. But given that the human nature of neither can exhaustively embrace the Eternal Word or the uncreated Wisdom,¹² the “Trinity” can never be designated as “Father, Jesus, and Spirit,” or as “Father, Jesus, and Mary,” but only as “Father, Son, and

¹¹ *John* 1:14 literally reads: “And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled in us.” The German Catholic theologian Matthias Scheeben and others of his school proposed the thesis that the union of believers with the Word analogically and profoundly mirrors the hypostatic union between Jesus and the Word, and actually flows mystically from it. When we translate *John* 1:14’s Greek preposition *en* literally with “in” rather than the more usual paraphrase “among,” it becomes clear that *John* 1:14 is speaking of the Word becoming flesh in all of humanity, without restriction to Jesus, though the modes involved certainly are variegated. The classical “incarnation” exegesis of the Fathers is therefore supported only indirectly by this phrase from *John* 1:14, though to be sure the surrounding verses speak directly of Christ’s person. But to speak of the hypostatic union of Jesus and the Word is also to speak of the mystical union of the Word and the Church. Thus *Colossians* 2:9-10 is not directly a proof text regarding Jesus’ divinity, but instead concerns the heavenly union of the Church and the Word: “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead corporeally. And you are filled in him.” Similarly, *John* 10:30, “I and the Father are one,” is not directly a proof text regarding Jesus’ unique divine nature, but rather, in light of verse 34, refers to the celestial essence of believers which they share in common with and through Christ: “Is it not written in your law: I said you are gods?”

¹² As early as St. Irenaeus, the Church Fathers understand the Word and Wisdom as the “two hands of God” through which God created humanity, and this Word and Wisdom are identified by the same author with the Son and Spirit; this surely reflects an apostolic tradition. Compare Qur’an sura 38:76, according to which God’s two hands created Adam: “He said: O Iblis! What hindereth thee from falling prostrate before that which I have created with both my hands?”

Spirit" (which also corresponds, in a different ordering, to "Father, Mother, and Son"—all three terms being strictly metaphorical when applied to the divine Reality). It is precisely the "triad" of God, Jesus, and Mary which is condemned, and rightly so even from a Christian perspective, in the Qur'an: "And when God saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside God? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right" (sura 5:116). No less a Christian authority than Thomas Aquinas could have approved of this Qur'anic censure, given his teaching on the non-identity between Jesus' created human nature and the divine Word. Sura 4:171 reinforces 5:116 and augments it: "O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit from Him." While respecting the providentially differing accentuations regarding the Christic reality in Islam and the Church, we may nevertheless legitimately recognize in sura 4:171 an essential affirmation, at least metaphysically considered, of the traditional Christian distinction between the two "natures" of Christ. "Messenger" denotes the earthly dimension of Jesus, while Christ's status as "Word and Spirit of God" transparently denotes his celestial dimension, or in the vocabulary of Christian tradition, the divine nature, with all due reservations and the proper qualifications naturally required by the Christian and Islamic theological wisdoms respectively.¹³

Some would be inclined to place the beginning of the Virgin's hypostatic union with Wisdom at the scene of the Annunciation, where the Spirit "overshadowed" her. Mary's union with

¹³ It is worth noting that the Qur'an repeatedly proclaims of Jesus that "he is the (or, 'a') Word of God." This goes further than any passage of the New Testament, even *John* chapter 1, in associating the divine Word with the human dimension of Christ. The Qur'anic "identitative" association of the Logos and Jesus, denoted by the word "is," metaphysically alludes to what Christian authors label the "union" of the "two natures." Thus the Qur'an, while accentuating the humanity of Jesus more forcefully than does Christianity, nevertheless also alludes to the "union" of Jesus and the Word in a more explicit manner than can be found in the Church's canonical texts.

the Spirit, however, must have begun even before her birth;¹⁴ this is one of the possible connotations of the dogma concerning her Immaculate Conception. Given the ontological distance, which from one point of view is infinite, between Mary's creaturely status and the uncreated Sophia, we cannot interpret the Hebrew scriptural passages on Lady Wisdom (*Proverbs* 8, *Sirach* 24) as denoting a hypostatic union of Mary and the Spirit in the "atemporal" phase of the holy Virgin's "preexistential existence."¹⁵ However, the Lady Wisdom passages may be said to connote a preexistential dimension to the Marian union with Wisdom, by virtue of the predestinating divine *consilium*. Taking the *Philippians* 2 christological hymn as a model, with certain modifications of course, and applying its paradigm of abasement and exaltation to the Virgin, we could say that though she was preexistentially united with the divine Wisdom, she nevertheless emptied and humbled herself, not despising to be the servant and slave of God, an essentially Qur'anic theme regarding both Jesus and his mother: "The Messiah will never scorn to be a slave unto God" (sura 4:172); "The Messiah . . . his mother was a saintly woman" (sura 5:75).¹⁶ And like Jesus, Mary humbled herself and God was well pleased with her humility and deigned to give her a name which would be blessed in all generations.

¹⁴ Consider the following Marian paradigm proffered by Frithjof Schuon: "[T]he Blessed Virgin is by her nature, and not by adoption, the human receptacle of the Holy Spirit. . . ; she . . . personifies [the Spirit]. It follows that an invocation of Mary . . . is . . . an invocation of the Holy Spirit. . . ." Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*. Ed. by James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2006), 128.

¹⁵ We are referring, naturally, to Plato's analogical doctrine of the preexistence of the soul. The phrase "preexistential existence" is far from a nonsensical play on words. We model it after the paradoxical utterance of Christ in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 19: "Blessed is he who existed before he existed." St. Irenaeus was the first Christian author to apply this logion to Christ. If it may be applied to the Messiah, then given Mary's bond with him, and her own hypostatic union with the divine Wisdom, which mirrors Christ's union with the Word, then we may justly also apply this Thomasian logion to the Virgin.

¹⁶ To call Jesus a slave or servant of God should not offend Christians; the same title is used throughout the New Testament to describe Christ. According to *Philippians* 2:7, Jesus "emptied himself and took the form of a slave."

She remained a servant of God until her earthly end. But with Mary's transfiguration, the bonds of human flesh are loosed and she "assumes" once again her union with the unbounded *Spiritus Sophiae* in the transparent mode she had "proleptically" enjoyed in her preexistential state. On Pentecost she is transfigured; she ascends to heaven, and "then" descends to earth in Paracletic mode to dwell in the hearts of believers as their Teacher.¹⁷ Again, this is to speak *sub specie aeternitatis*, and not in an historical mode of narration.

The episode in the *Gospel of John* between Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the garden implies that Jesus' resurrection involved an ascent to God followed by a descent back to earth (the spatial designations are all strictly metaphors for "states" rather than "localities"); for in the transitional state in which the Magdalene encounters him, he warns: "Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (20:17); yet soon thereafter, he invites the apostles to touch him, implying he had ascended in the "meanwhile." Yet in John, Jesus' death is his glorification, it is his resurrection and ascension, so that metaphysically viewed Jesus "did not die" but was raised to heaven. The Qur'an's insistence that, according to a particular manner of accentuation, Jesus did not die but was raised to God, agrees eminently with the Johannine paradigm. Now, if Mary's "departure" from the earthly scene on Pentecost day is viewed as an end which is simultaneously glorification and ascent to God, then the debates within the Church, one side arguing that Mary never died but was raised deathless to God, the other side arguing that Mary

¹⁷ Concerning the mutually interpenetrating models of the Marian and Muhammadan dimensions of the Paraclete, both are eschatological within their own parameters. The eschatological dimension of the Muhammadan reality of the Paraclete is made transparent in the following *hadith*, which given the equation Paraclete = Muhammad (in non-exhaustive mode), implies that the "historical" Muhammad lived, from the transcendent perspective, at the "end of the world": "The Prophet said, Jesus ('a) said, We bring what is revealed for you, but as for the interpretation, it will be brought by the Paraclete (*fārq-iliT*) at the end of time. (*'Awālī al-La'ālī*, 4, 124)." Quoted in chapter 18 of: *Jesus through Shi'ite Narrations*. Selected by Mahdi Muntazir Qaim. Translated by Al-Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen. (Qum, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 2004). Online version available at: http://al-islam.org/jesus_shiite_narrations📄

died a natural death and was then resurrected and assumed into heaven, these debates and opposing viewpoints can be seen as archetypally parallel to the “disagreements” between the Church and the Qur’an on whether Jesus passed into heaven through deathless ascension or through death followed by resurrection. Some eccentric Shi’ite gnostics were similarly divided on the question of whether Fatima ascended to heaven after death or in a deathless mode. Just as both positions on Jesus’ departure can be reconciled dialectically, so the intra-Church debates about the end of Mary’s life on earth can also be synthesized. Death cannot apply to the preexistent Logos; similarly, if Mary died a natural death, such death can apply only to her earthly nature, not to the preexistent Sophia “theophanically in-presenced,” or united with her humanity. Thus the theophanic “union” of earthly and celestial realities in Jesus explains the Qur’anic and Christian divergences concerning Jesus’ departure from the world. And the reality of the theophanic union of Mary with preexistent Sophia helps explain the disagreements among Catholic theologians concerning Mary’s departure from the world.

As we observed above, the statement that Christ is the “son of God” is a metaphorical statement principally meaning that he has been enthroned; and Mary’s own enthronement is reflected in her reception of the metaphorical title Daughter of God. The scriptural passages on the ascension of Christ are well known. But given the unbreakable unity between Mary and Christ, we would be justified in applying in an analogical sense the verses on Christ’s resurrection and ascension to Mary’s assumption. Christ by his ascension bestows upon creation the Spirit, manifested in Marian mode. We could also apply the texts that speak of Christ’s earthly end to that of Mary, and by this procedure we may uncover metaphysical truths concerning Mary’s own earthly destiny, assumption, and enthronement as “Daughter of God.”

The *Letter to the Hebrews* 1:8-9 quotes *Psalms* 44/45:7-8 and applies the passage to the ascension or enthronement of Christ, yet when we read the Psalm itself, we discover in verse 10: “The queen hath stood on thy right hand.” Who can this queen be, allegorically, if not Mary? Qur’an sura 23:50 mystically refers, according to one exegetical possibility, to the ascension of Christ and Mary as a single event: “And we appointed the son of Mary,

and his mother, for a sign: and we prepared an abode for them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs.” *Psalms* 44/45 also presents the enthronement of the heavenly king and queen, corresponding allegorically to Christ and Mary. *Psalms* 131:8 speaks anagogically of the ascension into heaven of Christ and Mary, the latter referred to as the ark, as an inseparable event: “Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place: thou and the ark, which thou hast sanctified.” *Apocalypse* 11:19-12:1 contains a vision—in a direct or indirect sense is inessential for our present purposes—of the ascended Mary as ark of the covenant: “And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and the ark of his testament was seen in his temple, and there were lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake, and great hail. And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Additional biblical verses may apply allegorically to Mary’s assumption. The “varieties” of the queen in *Psalms* 44/45 are traditionally interpreted as the divine graces bestowed upon Mary. Compare the passage with *Ephesians* 4:7-10:

7. But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ.
8. Wherefore he saith: Ascending on high, he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to men.
9. Now that he ascended, what is it, but because he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
10. He that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

The “lower parts of the earth” refer primarily not to the “underworld,” but to the earth itself as “lower” in comparison to the transcendent heavens. A Marian application of the *Ephesians* verses would be: “Now that *she* ascended, what is it, but because *she* also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? *She* that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens, that *she* might fill all things.” Compare *Sirach* 24:45 according to the Latin version: “I will penetrate to all the lower parts of the earth, and will behold all that sleep, and will enlighten all that

hope in God" (*penetrabo inferiores partes terrae et inspiciam omnes dormientes et inluminabo sperantes in Deo*). 24:26: "Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits" (*transite ad me omnes qui concupiscitis me et a generationibus meis implemini*). Consider also *Sirach* 24:8-10:

8. I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven [= ascension], and have penetrated into the bottom of the deep [= descent to earth], and have walked in the waves of the sea,
9. And have stood in all the earth [= she filled all things]; and in every people,
10. And in every nation I have had the chief rule.

Ephesians finds a parallel in *Sirach* 1:10: "And he poured her [Wisdom] out upon all his works, and upon all flesh according to his gift, and hath given her to them that love him" (*et effudit illam super omnia opera sua et super omnem carnem secundum datum suum et praebeuit illam diligentibus se*). On Pentecost, Peter quoted *Joel*, who prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, wording strikingly parallel to *Sirach* 1:10. The Wisdom and Spirit are essentially the same heavenly reality, and the Spirit poured out on Pentecost is the Spirit of the glorified, transfigured Mary, that is to say, the Spirit in Marian mode. The eschatological outpouring of the Spirit in *Joel* and *Acts* mirrors the primordial outpouring of Wisdom in *Sirach*. *Sirach* 1:9 says that God created Wisdom "in the Holy Spirit." This signifies that the uncreated divine dimension is the Spirit, whereas Wisdom is the created dimension (which from another standpoint is but the uncreated reality which manifests itself in the created world).

Psalms 109/110 is applied to Christ's enthronement in *Hebrews* 1, but the same Psalm is also applied to Mary in traditional exegesis, specifically verse 3: "from the womb before the daystar I begot thee." One must recall that in the Psalms, "to beget" primarily means "to enthrone." Speaking in metaphorical language, if the Logos is begotten, he is begotten from the divine Womb, which is the Spirit, Wisdom, which on the earthly plane is manifested as the Virgin Mary. "From the womb before the daystar I begot thee" can be interpreted in more than one

sense. It could mean that the *begetting* in question occurred before the daystar, or it could mean that the *womb* existed before the daystar, and from that womb the begetting issues forth. If we interpret it as a begetting from the womb which existed before the daystar, then we could say that the womb of the Spirit existed before the daystar; and the daystar is the light-bearer, in Latin “Lucifer.” Therefore this begetting, this birth is immaculate, for it occurs before Lucifer’s “fall.” The divine womb is immaculate also on the earthly plane, and from this follows the immaculate conception of Mary and the virginal conception and birth of her son Jesus.¹⁸

Luke’s temporal placement of the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the disciples on Pentecost forty days after the resurrection is a necessary literary-theological and liturgical historicization of an essentially or ultimately supra-temporal event. Scholars have long recognized that this forty-day schema is found only in *Luke*, and furthermore co-exists with another chronological version of events found in *Luke* 24, according to which both the ascension and resurrection occurred on “resurrection Sunday.” The latter chronology of ascension on resurrection Sunday is shared by the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John. Yet, as we observed in our introductory explorations into the Good Friday singularity, other verses in the Christian scriptures providentially “push back” the resurrection-ascension to Good Friday itself. Viewed from this last, most ancient evangelical perspective, we can deduce at least one of the reasons why there is no recorded appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his mother Mary. John records that on resurrection Sunday, Jesus breathed the Spirit into his disciples. This is the Johannine account of what in Luke is placed on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost. The Spirit he breathed on them was the Marian Spirit, the transfigured Spirit of Mary, the Holy Spirit in Marian mode. In view of their inseparable spiritual unity, Mary was, *sub specie aeternitatis*, transfigured and raised in the same “instant” as was Jesus. She was simply no longer on the earthly plane, in a restrictive sense, that is, in an

¹⁸ On the literal level, *Psalms* 109/110 refers to the enthronement of the Israelite kings. Analogically it speaks of Christ’s enthronement. Allegorically it refers to the preexistential enthronement of the Virgin.

“unglorified” state, for Jesus to appear to her on the “day” of his resurrection-ascension. But this is neither the last word, nor the only possible angle of theological vision in this regard. For if we, like John, view Jesus’ “crucifixion” as his glorification and return to God, then the Virgin Mary did witness the “resurrection,” for John informs us that the Virgin Mary was standing at the foot of the cross on Good Friday.¹⁹

Finally, let us not overlook the fact that the Christians of the east have since the beginning of the Church celebrated Easter on the West’s Good Friday.²⁰ The theological paradigm that “collapses” Good Friday and Easter together into a singularity is startling in its implications for theology and history.²¹ It is no

¹⁹ We recall here a curious vision of Anne Catherine Emmerich which claims that the Holy Shroud was miraculously formed at the foot of the cross on Good Friday, and not three days later during the resurrection. In its own way, this vision may suggest the co-incidence of Good Friday and Easter in a transcendent, atemporal sense. And let us not forget the eschatologically coinciding dimensions of Good Friday and the death of Mary, both of which “coincide” with the essence of the *parousia*. These sacred facts explain the symbolism employed by the patristic literature in seeing the death of Mary as having repeated much of the symbolism of Good Friday. Maria de Àgreda, writing on the *Transitus* of Mary in her *Mystical City of God*, reflects such patristic paradigms in the following remarks: “This glorious Transition of the great Queen took place in the hour in which her divine Son had died, at three o’clock on a Friday. . . . Great wonders and prodigies happened at the precious death of the Queen; for the sun was eclipsed (as I have mentioned above) and its light was hidden in sorrow for some hours.”

²⁰ See Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1958), 174.

²¹ For instance, if Good Friday and Easter intersect atemporally, then the whole question of the “empty tomb” appears in a new light. In the primitive *Gospel of Thomas* as well as in the New Testament epistles *en toto*, there is no concern at all with the idea of an empty tomb. The issue arises only in the Gospels, which reflect a providential secondary historicization and segmentation of the Good Friday singularity refracted as symbolically independent “events” projected onto the plane of history. If Easter and Good Friday coincide at a certain point, then we may say that Jesus ascended to God from the cross. This insight is the direct cause of the debates within the early Church concerning the fate of Jesus’ body and the nature of his transfigured *corpus*. We are here at the very limits of human thought and discourse as we approach the “event horizon” of a sacred mystery of singularity which though supra-temporal,

wonder that in the second century the bishop of Rome excommunicated the entire body of eastern Christianity on account of its divergent feast day for Easter. Thanks to the efforts of the peaceful St. Irenaeus, the west was convinced that unity could coexist with diversity of theological articulation and vision, and the excommunication was overturned.

* * *

M R James translation of the transfiguration scene from the
Apocalypse of Peter

And my Lord Jesus Christ our King said unto me: Let us go unto the holy mountain. And his disciples went with him, praying. And behold there were two men there, and we could not look upon their faces, for a light came from them, shining greater than the sun, and their raiment also was shining, and cannot be described, and nothing is sufficient to be compared unto them in this world. And the sweetness of them was such that no mouth is able to utter the beauty of their appearance, for their aspect was astonishing and wonderful. And, in a word, I cannot describe how it shineth in its aspect above crystal. Like the flower of roses is the appearance of the colour of his aspect and of his body; his head was a marvel. And upon his (their) shoulders and on their foreheads was a crown of nard woven of fair flowers. As the rainbow in the time of rain, so was their hair. And such was the comeliness of their countenance, adorned with all manner of ornament. And when we saw them on a sudden, we marvelled. And I drew near unto the Lord Jesus Christ and said unto him: O my Lord, who are these? And he said unto me: They are Moses and Elias. And I said unto

nevertheless participates in the vicissitudes of spacetime. The nature of Good Friday is such that the point of its singularity can be recognized by theological vision only when all its aspects (which by divine inspiration appear as historicized refractions in the Gospels) “collapse” together. It cannot be discerned as long as the various “aspects” remain under separate consideration as distinct events in the absolute or literal “historical” sense.

him: [Show unto us also] Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the righteous fathers. And he showed us a great garden, open, full of fair trees and blessed fruits, and of the odour of perfumes. The fragrance thereof was pleasant and came even unto us. And thereof of that tree saw I much fruit. And my Lord and God Jesus Christ said unto me: Hast thou seen the companies of the fathers?

As is their rest, such also is the honour and the glory of them that are persecuted for my righteousness' sake. And I rejoiced and believed and understood that which is written in the book of my Lord Jesus Christ. And I said unto him: O my Lord, wilt thou that I make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias? And he said unto me in wrath: Satan maketh war against thee, and hath veiled thine understanding; and the good things of this world prevail against thee. Thine eyes therefore must be opened and thine ears unstopped that a tabernacle [be seen], not made with men's hands, which my heavenly Father hath made for me and for the elect. And we beheld it and were full of gladness.

And behold, suddenly there came a voice from heaven, saying: This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: [obey] my commandments. And then came a great and exceeding white cloud over our heads and bare away our Lord and Moses and Elias. And I trembled and was afraid: and we looked up and the heaven opened and we beheld men in the flesh, and they came and greeted our Lord and Moses and Elias and went into another heaven. And the word of the scripture was fulfilled: This is the generation that seeketh him and seeketh the face of the God of Jacob. And great fear and commotion was there in heaven and the angels pressed one upon another that the word of the scripture might be fulfilled which saith: Open the gates, ye princes.

Thereafter was the heaven shut, that had been open.

And we prayed and went down from the mountain, glorifying God, who hath written the names of the righteous in heaven in the book of life.

9. On the Possibility of the Multiplicity of Logos Incarnations

Some Denotative Christic and Connotative Marian Reflections Based on Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, Tertia Pars, 3, Articles 5, 7, and 8

ST 3, 3, a 5. *Whether each of the Divine Persons could have assumed human nature?*

Whatever the Son can do, so can the Father and the Holy Ghost, otherwise the power of the three Persons would not be one. But the Son was able to become incarnate. Therefore the Father and the Holy Ghost were able to become incarnate. . . .

Therefore the Divine power could have united human nature to the Person of the Father or of the Holy Ghost, as It united it to the Person of the Son. And hence we must say that the Father or the Holy Ghost could have assumed flesh even as the Son.

Summa theologiae 3, 3, article 5 affirms not only that the Logos, but also the Holy Spirit can unite hypostatically with a human being. Thus it is connotatively possible within the confines of Catholic theology, based on this Aquinas passage, that the Virgin Mary could conceivably be an “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit; based on sacred scripture and tradition, it is at the very least probable that Mary was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, and additional material from scripture and tradition can be gathered in order to offer evidence for the possible validity of this claim. St. Maximilian Kolbe teaches that Mary is a “quasi” incarnation of the Holy Spirit. *Sirach* 24:4 has Lady Wisdom

refer to “my throne,” and this must be the ultimate source of the Marian name *Sedes Sapientiae*. The theological implications are enormous for Mariology, for the following conclusion obtains in this regard: The throne upon which primordial celestial Lady Wisdom sits is none other than the Virgin; that is, the foundation upon which the uncreated Wisdom rests is the created human nature of Wisdom “incarnate,” the Virgin Mary. In short, the title *Sedes Sapientiae* implies a hypostatic union of Mary and Lady Wisdom, the latter being none other than the Spirit of God. The Marian title “Spouse of the Holy Spirit” implies a “union” between the Virgin and the Spirit, and that the mode of this union might be hypostatic is, as we have seen, connotatively possible from a Thomistic perspective.

The ancient *Gospel of the Hebrews*, accepted by St Jerome as authentic, has Christ refer to “My Mother the Holy Spirit,” and this suggests that Mary might be an incarnation of the Spirit in some sense. The *Gospel of the Hebrews* also teaches that the Virgin Mary preexisted on the celestial plane as the Archangel Michael. The name Michael, which means, “Like God” (whether as a question or a statement is not important in this context), functions here as a symbol of a celestial or “divine” nature, once again implying that the Virgin possesses not only a human aspect, but a “divine” dimension as well. Jewish-Christian theology similarly identified Christ with both Gabriel (cf. the anti-Gnostic *Epistle of the Apostles* ch. 14, roughly contemporaneous with the *Gospel of John*) and Michael (cf. the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Parable 8); since the name Gabriel in Hebrew means “Mighty Man,” Gabriel transparently refers symbolically to the human nature of Christ, whereas Jesus’ “Michaelian” aspect as ascended Head of the Church and of the Cosmos, transparently refers symbolically to Christ’s “divine” nature. The Great Church, not recognizing the metaphorical and symbolic nature of Jewish Christianity’s theological discourse, naturally misinterpreted such language as heretical. We further recall that the Christian liturgies, east and west, have in all ages universally applied the Lady Wisdom biblical passages to the Virgin Mary. One also recalls in this context that both Judaism and primitive Jewish Christianity described the Spirit of God as a feminine being, reminiscent of Lady Wisdom.

We could further argue, by analogy, with reference to *ST* 3, 3, article 7, which is explicated below, that just as the Logos could hypostatically unite with human beings other than Jesus Christ, so could the divine Sophia (the Holy Spirit) hypostatically unite with a multiplicity of human beings, either simultaneously or successively.

Article 7. Whether one Divine Person can assume two human natures?

Whatever the Father can do, that also can the Son do. But after Incarnation the Father can still assume a human nature distinct from that which the Son has assumed; for in nothing is the power of the Father or the Son lessened by Incarnation of the Son. Therefore it seems that after Incarnation the Son can assume another human nature distinct from the one He has assumed.

I answer that, What has power for one thing, and no more, has a power limited to one. Now the power of a Divine Person is infinite, nor can it be limited by any created thing. Hence it may not be said that a Divine Person so assumed one human nature as to be unable to assume another. For it would seem to follow from this that the Personality of the Divine Nature was so comprehended by one human nature as to be unable to assume another to its Personality; and this is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature. Hence it is plain that, whether we consider the Divine Person in regard to His power, which is the principle of the union, or in regard to His Personality, which is the term of the union, it has to be said that the Divine Person, over and beyond the human nature which He has assumed, can assume another distinct human nature.

Reply to Objection 1. A created nature is completed in its essentials by its form, which is multiplied according to the division of matter. And hence, if the composition of matter and form constitutes a new suppositum, the consequence is that the nature is multiplied by the multiplication of sup-

posita. But in the mystery of Incarnation the union of form and matter, i.e. of soul and body, does not constitute a new suppositum, as was said above (6). Hence there can be a numerical multitude on the part of the nature, on account of the division of matter, without distinction of supposita.

Reply to Objection 2. For a man who has on two garments is not said to be “two persons clothed,” but “one clothed with two garments”; and whoever has two qualities is designated in the singular as “such by reason of the two qualities.” Now the assumed nature is, as it were, a garment... And hence, if the Divine Person were to assume two human natures, He would be called, on account of the unity of suppositum, one man having two human natures. . . . [I]f two Divine Persons were to assume one singular human nature, they would be said to be one man. . .

ST 3, 3, article 7 contains Aquinas’ clear affirmation that the Logos, the eternal Word of God, can hypostatically unite with human beings other than Jesus Christ. This obviously necessitates that although the Logos hypostatically united with the man Jesus Christ, nevertheless there can be no simplistic identity which equates Jesus’ created humanity with the uncreated Word, otherwise a contingent reality would have exhaustively circumscribed the divine Logos, which is clearly impossible according to Aquinas.¹ The Replies to Objections 1 and 2 establish that the divine unity of the eternal Logos would not be compromised even by a multiplicity of simultaneous incarnations, for the unity of suppositum would remain integrally intact.

One must qualify here that within the strict confines of Thomism, reflecting its understandable Christian confessional function and framework, though granting the possibility of the Logos assuming a human nature other than that of Jesus Christ’s, Thomas, in conformity with the accentuations of traditional Christian dogma, might well consider this theoretical possibility

¹ The angelic doctor also explores the question of multiple Logos incarnations in his commentary on the sentences of Lombard; see *Sententiarum* lib. 3 d1 q.2 a5.

as either improbable, improper, or unfitting, given the New Testament's portrayal of Christ's unique creative and mediatorial roles in creation and the redemptive new creation respectively. We are therefore confronted with the question as to whether an incarnation of the Logos after Christ's incarnation would imply an imperfection in the unicity of the divine will relating to creation and the new creation, that is, would this detract from the unicity of the cosmic redemption by Christ? The possibility of multiple incarnations in itself relates to the question of the diversity of religions. The various revelations naturally understand the reality of Logos manifestation in different senses; certainly *Hebrews* 1:1-2 speaks of Logos manifestations as having occurred throughout salvation history in various modes and in different degrees, and *Wisdom* 7:27, which Thomas employs, as we will explore below, to explain the possibility of multiple manifestations of the unitary Logos, indicates indirectly more than a mere possibility of incarnational multiplicity, for this verse, which strictly speaking refers to Wisdom, and only indirectly to the Word (Logos),² states that Wisdom "has," past tense, passed into many holy souls and prophets in many nations. Admittedly the verse does not specify the mode of such "indwelling,"³ but we

² This quality of "indirectness" is also reflected in the fact that the Jewish scriptural passages regarding Lady Wisdom, beginning with *Proverbs* 8, are never directly quoted in the New Testament with reference to Christ as the Wisdom of God; the Lady Wisdom passages are always alluded to only indirectly, so much so that a large number of biblical experts, especially Protestant exegetes, deny that the Christian scriptures ever refer in any sense, or in any context, to the Wisdom passages in *Sirach* 24, *Wisdom* 7, or *Baruch* 3-4.

³ The Church traditionally looks with disfavor upon the formulation that Christ's incarnation is through "indwelling"; yet although the term "indwelling" can be understood in unorthodox senses, nevertheless, the term is sanctioned in the sacred scriptures: *John* 1:14 reads literally in the Greek: "And the Word was made flesh, and *dwelt* in us." "Us" refers to humanity, and by extension, to human nature, and this is the verse's precise point, namely, that the Word indwelt human nature, which is equivalent to the same verse's term "became flesh" (*sarx*), which does not refer directly to the physical body as such, but rather to the flesh as contrasted with the spirit; that is, the human or natural order in contrast with the divine order. This exegesis is confirmed by the fact that the Greek text's "dwelt" literally means "tabernacled," so that when the verse continues, "and we saw his glory," it is obvious that the Logos' incarnation

would maintain that Thomas is justified when he refers to this verse in the context of the question of multiple Logos incarnations. The verse's phrase "many nations" implies that God has granted revelations to nations beyond Israel, that is, beyond Judaism,⁴ and this indicates the heavenly origin of the world's diverse religions; the same Lady Wisdom referred to in *Wisdom* 7:27 states in *Sirach* 24:9-10: "And I have stood in all the earth, and in every people, And in every nation I have had the chief rule." Here the phrase "many nations" becomes "every nation," indicating a universality of heavenly revelation, and this accords well with the Islamic tradition which holds that God sent 124,000 Prophets into all nations of the world. Consider also Qur'an 22:67: "Unto each nation have We given sacred rites . . ." and 5:48: "For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way [= religion]. Had God willed He could have made you one community. . . . Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ."

From a Christian perspective, regarding the era before Christ's incarnation, it may be implicitly affirmed, based upon *Wisdom* 7:27 and *Sirach* 24:9-10, that there were heavenly rev-

is understood here in accordance with the Old Testament Jewish conception of the *kabod*, glory, which indwelt the tabernacle and temple.

⁴ *Isaiah* 45 implies that Zoroastrianism is a heavenly revelation, for the Zoroastrian king Cyrus is there spoken of as YHWH's Messiah; the Church Fathers understand this passage as a prophecy of Christ the Lord. The ancient *Epistle of Barnabas* sees in the name Cyrus an allusion to the Greek word for "Lord," Kyrios. The Church seems never to have considered or explored seriously the theological significance for the universality of revelation which is implied in the fact that Christ is prefigured by a "pagan" Zoroastrian king. We should remark, though, that in addition to recognizing the authenticity of Islam as a heavenly revelation, Nicolas of Cusa in his *De pace fidei* also asserts that Zoroastrianism is a true heavenly religion. As Frithjof Schuon writes, for Muslims "the name of Cyrus—Koresch in Hebrew—evokes that of Quraysh, the name of the tribe of Muhammad." Frithjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2002), 232. Such Islamic prophetic interpretations are no more assailable than are the Church's (or the New Testament's) non-literal understandings of Old Testament prophecy; one could also, as does Schuon, refer in the Jewish domain to the paraphrasing freedom found both in the Greek Septuagint translation and in the Aramaic *targumim*.

elations involving Logos manifestations (in different modes including perhaps even “hypostatic” union or “incarnation” in some sense) other than the one vouchsafed to Israel.⁵ For Christian theology, the twofold question remains: Is it possible or fitting that after Christ’s incarnation there be further heavenly revelations as well as further Logos or Wisdom incarnations? From an Islamic perspective the possibility of post-Christian heavenly revelation can apply only to Islam, for this is held to be the final revelation. However, there is also the question of the historically post-Christian Neoplatonic philosophy school, especially as represented by the sages Plotinus and Proclus. Though the early Church demonized Greek philosophy, the former’s theology is essentially a prolongation of the latter, and is specifically derived from non-Christian, at times even anti-Christian (though not anti-Christ), authors born centuries after the Messiah’s coming. We especially allude to Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, the general system of which Dionysius adopted in works which were to shape Christian theology to the present day in both the East and the West. In the West, both Aristotle and Plato informed the work of Aquinas, whose stature in many ways remains unrivaled. That the soul of Christian theology emanates from post-Christian, even anti-Christian (extrinsically at least) Greek “pagans” cannot be without theological significance in itself, and on its own level raises the question of how the Logos could operate in Greek paganism centuries after Christ’s founding of the Church.⁶ The same point of religious

⁵ That the Mosaic Torah was a Logos manifestation analogous to that involved in the case of Christ is implied by *John* 1:17, especially when one views this verse in the light of *Sirach* 24:23, Latin = 24:32-33, and *Baruch* 3:28, 37-4:1, Latin = 3:28, 38-4:1, for both these passages imply that Lady Wisdom appeared hypostatically upon earth as the Torah; the Church has in fact applied the *Baruch* hypostatic Torah passage in question to the incarnation of Christ.

⁶ For the various aspects of the Hellenic literature and schools of philosophy which resemble the paradigms of revealed religion, see Algis Uždavinys, “From Homer to the Glorious Qur’an: Hermeneutical Strategies in the Hellenic and Islamic Traditions,” 79-111. From one angle, Hellenic philosophy represents an esoteric view or interpretation of the traditional Greek religion, equivalent to the function of Vedanta metaphysics in Hinduism; however, from another angle, the theurgic, initiatory, and general Orphic elements of Hellenic

assimilation of Greek philosophy may be raised with reference, *mutatis mutandi*, to Islam (Avarroes, Ibn Sina, Al Farabi; some Sufis considered Plato a Prophet) and to Judaism. The latter case can be illustrated above all by the examples of the biblical *Book of Wisdom* (which scholarship universally acknowledges as a Jewish integration of the perennial Platonic doctrines), Philo, the *Zohar*, the Kabbalistic system in general, and Maimonides. Let it be remembered that Porphyry composed a treatise titled “Against the Christians,” not “Against Christ.” Indeed, in the *City of God* XIX, 23, Augustine quotes Porphyry as follows: “What we are going to say will certainly take some by surprise, for the gods have declared that Christ was very pious, and has become immortal, and that they cherish his memory; that the Christians, however, are polluted, contaminated, and involved in error.” Porphyry admired Christ, and even a Christian might sympathize, to a certain degree, with his negative view of certain imperfect Christians, especially when one takes into account such incidents as St. Cyril’s apparent complicity in the murder of Plotinian philosopher Hypatia, as well as the Church’s persecution of Greek philosophers, such as Emperor Justinian’s criminalization of Greek “pagan” philosophy, which led to the harassment as well as personal and professional uprooting of countless godly sages. What an irony indeed for the worshippers of the Logos to persecute the selfsame Logos in the great Neoplatonic philosophers; the various persecutions against Christians were of course also “illogical,” that is, anti-Logos actions. Regarding Hypatia, Damascius blames her murder on St. Cyril’s mob incitement, and John, Bishop of Nikiu, gleefully agrees. Socrates the ecclesiastical historian distances St. Cyril from the murder and condemns the rioting mob instead.

philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, would seem to situate the latter within the boundaries of the traditional religious sphere. From this perspective, Neoplatonism is an esoteric *dimension* of the Greek religion itself, so that Neoplatonism could not, by definition, be practiced (and it did constitute a practice, method, or “way” as much as an intellection) apart from the traditional religion. On the general “religious” dimensions of Greek philosophy, see Algis Uždavinys, *The Golden Chain. An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2004), xi-xxviii.

To return to the question of Islam as a post-Christian revelation, for Christian theology, at least in principle, many problems are, or can be, resolved by the fact that Islam, strictly speaking, does not claim to be a new or different religion apart from the primordial religion of Adam and, by extension, of Abraham, which manifested itself throughout history in Judaism and Christianity. In this sense, Islam does not claim to be a “new religion” after Christianity. Therefore, to the usual Christian objection against Islam, namely, that the Church awaits no new revelation after Christ until the *parousia*, it can be answered that Islam is not a heavenly revelation *of a new religion*, but of the same primordial religion manifested by Moses and Christ. This is at least one reason why Nicolas of Cusa can, and in fact explicitly does, assert in his extraordinary treatise *De pace fidei* that Islam is a valid and true heavenly revelation. In the same work, Nicolas of Cusa maintains that neither Islam nor Judaism denies the incarnation or the Trinity in any sense that a well-informed Christian also would not.⁷ This Christian magnanimity based on intellection also manifested itself in Pope Pius XI when he said to Cardinal Facchinetti, Apostolic Legate to Libya: “Do not think that you are going among infidels. Muslims attain to salvation. The ways of Providence are infinite.”⁸ This reminds us of the following forceful Qur’anic passages:

2:62: Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right—surely their reward is with their Lord,

⁷ Nicolas of Cusa maintains that the divine Essence in itself is neither One nor Three, in that it is beyond all number when viewed from the perspective of apophysis or *via negativa*; thus Nicolas equally relativizes both Muslim and Christian theology.

⁸ See *L’Ultima*, Anno VIII, 75-76, p. 261 (Florence, 1954); cited in Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century. Shaikh Ahmad Al-‘Alawi*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 81.

and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.⁹

2:113 And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true); yet both are readers of the Scripture. Even thus speak those who know not. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differ.

2:135 And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters.

2:136 Say (O Muslims): We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.

2:139 Say (unto the People of the Scripture): Dispute ye with us concerning God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Ours are our works and yours your works. We look to Him alone.

⁹ Cf. *Acts* 10:34-35: "God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh justice, is acceptable to him." If on the one hand Christ says "no one cometh unto the Father but through me," on the other hand this same Christ in *Matthew* 25:31-46 does not include a confessional Christian faith in him among the requirements of eternal salvation. *Matthew* 7:16: "By their fruits you shall know them"; this verse alone, in view of the undeniable piety found in all the great world religions, should suffice on a practical level to establish the diverse religions' heavenly origins. To ascribe the piety and miracles in non-Christian religions to a supposed "natural mysticism" is both illogical and arrogant. See Frithjof Schuon's essay, "Is there a Natural Mysticism?" in his *Gnosis: Divine Wisdom*. Tr. by G.E.H. Palmer (Pates Manor, Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1990), 30-37.

2:140 Or say ye that Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: Do ye know best, or doth God? And who is more unjust than he who hideth a testimony which he hath received from God? God is not unaware of what ye do.

3:67 Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to God), and he was not of the idolaters.

5:69 Lo! Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans, and Christians—whosoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right—there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.

57:28 O ye who believe! fear God and believe His Apostle: two portions of His mercy will He give you. He will bestow on you light to walk in, and He will forgive you: for God is Forgiving, All-Merciful:

57:29 That the People of the Book may know that they have no control over aught of the favors of God, and that these gifts of grace are in the hands of God, and that He vouchsafeth them to whom He will; for God is of infinite bounty.

At the exoteric dogmatic level, the theological problem of a further Logos incarnation after Christ in the case of Muhammad does not exist for Islam, for the latter providentially rejects the doctrine of incarnation. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that in esoteric Islamic metaphysics, that is, in Sufi thought and in Shi'ite gnosis, Muhammad is assimilated to the Logos; this is transparent in the doctrine of the first divine emanation called the *Nur Muhammadi*, which is the "pre-eternal," primordial, preexistent Muhammadan Light; this light was manifested in the prophets beginning with Adam and concluded with Muhammad; according to Shi'ite gnosis, this light is transmitted in some mode also after Muhammad in the line of the twelve holy imams, and certainly 'Ali is assimilated to the Logos

in the Shi'ite *ahadith*; as we will see below, Rumi integrates even al-Hallaj into this schema.

Therefore, the sole question that remains for Christian theology in the present context is: Can *Wisdom* 7:27's paradigm of possible multiple Logos or Wisdom manifestations/incarnations preceding Christ's incarnation be possibly or fittingly applicable after Christ's incarnation? The official dogmas of the Church, understandably, cannot be expected to accentuate, or perhaps even to admit, such a fittingness, given the legitimate confessional functions and confines of dogma and theology. However, on the metaphysical plane, the intellectual use of philosophy and analogy might identify certain trajectories of universalist potentiality and propensity in sacred scripture, the Church Fathers, and Christian mystics which may open out onto a plane of thought that could perhaps allow for the possibility of the *fittingness* of incarnation/s or in a certain sense heavenly revelation/s after Christ. Nicolas of Cusa's affirmation of Islam as an authentic heavenly revelation would seem to constitute corroborating evidence for this thesis. But often these metaphysical realities can only be alluded to through ellipsis, necessarily evading clear crystallizations at the formal level of theological language, all language being limitative, even though adequate to the purpose. One thinks analogously in this context of how a faint star of particularly low magnitude is visible to the naked eye only when it is indirectly observed, to the side of the direct field of vision; when one attempts to focus directly on such a star, it fades from sight.

The following two scriptural passages imply a multiplicity of Logos manifestations before and up to the time of Christ's incarnation: *Wisdom* 7:27, 29a: "And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh herself the friends of God and prophets. . . . For she is more beautiful than the sun. . . ."; *Letter to the Hebrews* 1:1-2: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us in a Son." The ancient Jewish-Christian document *Clementine Homilies* 3:20 arguably goes further temporally when it has Peter explain concerning the "True Prophet" Christ: "[H]e alone has it [the Holy Spirit], who has changed his forms

and his names from the beginning of the world, and so reappeared again and again in the world, until coming upon his own times, and being anointed with mercy for the works of God, he shall enjoy rest for ever.” This passage implies that the True Prophet will reappear again and again until he rests in eternity, where he will “rest forever,” having then “come upon his own times.”¹⁰

Above we quoted along with *Wisdom* 7:27 verse 29a’s reference to Lady Wisdom’s beauty. This will prepare us for the following passage from Reynold A. Nicholson who introduces a poem by Rumi that speaks of the divine Beauty, which here functions as an equivalent of the Logos, that “clothes” itself in the great figures of sacred history from Noah to al-Hallaj:

In a magnificent ode Jalaluddin Rumi describes how the One Light shines in myriad forms through the whole universe, and how the One Essence, remaining ever the same, clothes itself from age to age in the prophets and saints who are its witnesses to mankind.

Every moment the robber Beauty rises in a different shape, ravishes the soul, and disappears.

Every instant that Loved One assumes a new garment, now of eld, now of youth.

Now He plunged into the heart of the substance of the potter’s clay—the Spirit plunged, like a diver.

Anon He rose from the depths of mud that is moulded and baked, then He appeared in the world.

He became Noah, and at His prayer the world was flooded while He went into the Ark.

He became Abraham and appeared in the midst of the fire, which turned to roses for His sake.

¹⁰ This is the interpretation given by Kaufmann Kohler and Louis Ginzberg in their “Clementina” entry in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906 edition): “The true prophet has appeared not in one, but in various forms; changing name and shape, he will traverse this world until he finds rest in the coming world (ib. iii. 20).”

For a while He was roaming on the earth to pleasure Himself,

Then He became Jesus and ascended to the dome of Heaven and began to glorify God.

In brief, it was He that was coming and going in every generation thou hast seen,

Until at last He appeared in the form of an Arab and gained the empire of the world.

What is it that is transferred? What is transmigration in reality? The lovely winner of hearts

Became a sword and appeared in the hand of 'Ali and became the Slayer of the time.

No! no! for 'twas even He that was crying in human shape, '*Ana 'l-Haqq.*'

That one who mounted the scaffold was not Mansur though the foolish imagined it.

Rumi hath not spoken and will not speak words of infidelity: do not disbelieve him!

Whosoever shows disbelief is an infidel and one of those who have been doomed to Hell.¹¹

The various scriptural witnesses to religious universality lead us back to the question of Aquinas' specific faith, in agreement with traditional Christian theology, which holds to the exclusive and unique role of Christ in creation and the new creation. We would suggest that this absoluteness of Christ encompasses dialectically an aspect of expansiveness, that is, the Christic aspect of "sole" opens out onto the plane of diversity and universalism, and if this applies to the time even after Christ's incarnation, this would not necessarily imply any defect in the singularity of the divine intention relating to creation and new creation with regard to Christ's unique role therein. The attempt to integrate the revelation of Islam into this paradigm certainly complicates the issue, but it is a necessary complication in this context; and the thesis which relates in some way the idea of the Holy Spirit's "incarnation" with Islam's "Paracletic" substance can itself go

¹¹ Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1914), 152-53.

only so far within the Christian framework, given the concrete limitations of human language, and given that the various religions must providentially remain separate, in order that the varying heavenly revelations retain and preserve their individual uniquenesses and “absolutivities,” God loving diversity, which is self-evident from the One’s “tendency” to issue forth through “overflow” into the cosmic Many.

The Christian conception of the cosmic significance and role of Christ is typified in verses such as *Colossians* 1:16 and 20 which refer to Christ in his relation to heaven and earth (= cosmos) in creation and new creation. A cosmic role of Christ is also upheld in the Qur’an, which, we should not forget, confesses that not Muhammad, but Jesus is the promised Messiah. Indeed, the Qur’an not only upholds the cosmic role of Christ, but this role is presented as inseparable from the cosmic significance and role of the Virgin Maryam, as in sura 21:91: “And she who was chaste, therefore We breathed into her Our Spirit and made her and her son a Sign for all the worlds” (*lil’alamina*, ‘worlds’ = ‘cosmos’). Mary’s cosmic significance is, in part, explained by sura 3:42: “And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of the worlds” (compare *Luke* 1:42, 48). Whereas any subsequent cosmic role for a Prophet after Jesus is viewed as unfitting and contradictory for traditional Christian theology, in the Qur’an the cosmic role of Christ (inseparable from Mary) coexists simultaneously with that of Muhammad: “We sent thee (Muhammad) not save as a Mercy for all the worlds” (sura 21:107). This coexistence of sacred cosmic roles in the economy of salvation is possible, in part, because whereas at one level the Qur’an presents Jesus as the unique Christ, at another complementary level he is, on account of his humanity, integrated within the entirety of the Prophetic line: “Say: We believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord.

We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered” (sura 2:136).¹²

It is necessary at this juncture to recall the most fundamental points of the classical Christian doctrine concerning Christ’s incarnation. For this, we will rely on Aquinas’ *Summa contra gentiles* IV:39, “The Doctrine of Catholic Faith concerning the Incarnation”:

According to the tradition of Catholic faith we must say that in Christ there is one perfect divine nature, and a perfect human nature, made up of a rational soul and human flesh; and that these two natures are united in Christ, not by mere indwelling of the one in the other, or in any accidental way, as a man is united with his garment, but in unity of one person. For since Holy Scripture without any distinction assigns the things of God to the Man Christ, and the things of the Man Christ to God, He must be one and the same person, of whom both varieties of attributes are predicable. But because opposite attributes are not predicable of one and the same subject in the same respect, and there is an opposition between the divine and human attributes that are predicated of Christ—as that He is passible and impassible, dead and immortal, and the like—these divine and human attributes must be predicated of Christ in different respects. If we consider that of which these opposite attributes are predicated, we shall find no distinction to draw, but unity appears there. But considering that according to which these several predications are made, there we shall see the need of drawing a distinction. Since that according to which divine attributes are predicated of Christ is different from that according to which human attributes are predicated of Him, we must say that there are in Him two

¹² Yet the Qur’an also teaches that God has exalted various Prophets above others (2:252-53); there is thus some justification for each religion to see its own Prophet as the most exalted of all the divine Messengers. For an insightful dialectical analysis of the concept of “the best religion” and “the best Prophet,” see Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam. Essays on Esoteric Ecumenism*. Tr. Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1985), 159ff.

natures, unamalgamated and unalloyed. And since that of which these human and divine attributes are predicated is one and indivisible, we must say that Christ is one person, and one suppositum, supporting a divine and a human nature. Thus alone will divine attributes duly and properly be predicated of the Man Christ, and human attributes of the Word of God.

The perceptive reader will notice in the above passage that although Jesus and the Word are united as one person, or in the unity of one person, nevertheless there are two natures, divine and human, in this one person. This leads into Aquinas' observation in *ST* 3, 3, a 7 regarding the distinction between the uncreated Logos and the humanity of Christ which necessitates that the oneness of Jesus and the Logos is not that of a simplistic identity: "Now the power of a Divine Person is infinite, nor can it be limited by any created thing. . . . [T]his is impossible, for the Uncreated cannot be comprehended by any creature."¹³ This necessitates that the humanity of Jesus did not literally preexist, but that the uncreated Logos preexisted and was the medium of creation. When therefore a hymn such as is found in *Colossians* 1:15ff. projects the historically incarnate "Christ Jesus" into the protological domain as medium of creation, the term "Christ Jesus" serves to underline the fact of the oneness of person in the incarnation, yet the term cannot be taken in such a "literal" sense as to assume the preexistence of the created historical humanity of Jesus of Nazareth in pre-eternity. The *Colossians* hymn asserts the uncreated Logos' role in creation, and only in proleptic view of the incarnation in history is the name Jesus here joined to the figure of the Logos. Thus the unity of Jesus and the Logos is both one and differentiated; the

¹³ To confuse the created with the Uncreated would literally be blasphemy; thus the Qur'an is right to deny that "God is the Messiah," for this is directed against the heresy which denied the humanity of Christ. The Qur'an never denies that the Messiah "is" God, only that God is the Messiah; the difference is simultaneously subtle and glaring, and all-important for theology, Christian and Islamic.

term “Christ Jesus”¹⁴ stresses the unity of person, but because the created human nature is not the uncreated divine Logos, the cosmic role of the Logos in creation is expansive and inclusive, not reductive and exclusive. Thus, in this paradigm, the same type of hymn as found in *Colossians* 1:15ff. could be sung of any other Logos incarnation, would there be such. And indeed, there are a number of extant Jewish texts which portray various prophets as Logos “incarnations” whose cosmic roles exist in a complementary and not contradictory mode. *Sirach* 50 portrays the high priest Simon as a manifestation on the earthly plane of the divine hypostatic Glory (*kabod*) and of Lady Wisdom.¹⁵ The ancient Jewish *Prayer of Joseph* states that the leading angel of heaven, called the “first-born of all creation,” “dwelt among us” in the world as the patriarch Jacob. *1 Enoch*, which St. Jude quotes as authentic scripture in verse 14 of his *Epistle*, identifies the patriarch Enoch as the Son of Man and Messiah. *3 Enoch* denominates Enoch as the Lesser YHWH who has been enthroned in heaven, who has been given the Name of God, and who receives the worship of the hosts of heaven (a striking

¹⁴ It would be instructive to observe that in early Judaism, such as is recorded in *1 Enoch*, the Messiah, or Christ, was seen not as a human being, but as a preexistent celestial entity. The concept of the celestial Messiah’s descent to the world illumines for us the early Jewish-Christian Ebionite doctrine of the descent of “the Christ” upon the human being Jesus of Nazareth. The Ebionite doctrine properly understood is thus not a Christian heresy, but an orthodox and ancient Jewish mode of belief. John A. T. Robinson presents what he believes is evidence in the New Testament of an early stream of tradition which in various ways distinguishes between Jesus and the office of Messiah. See “The Most Primitive Christology of All?” in John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies. Studies in Biblical Theology* No. 34 (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1962), 139-53.

¹⁵ See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam. Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002), 56-87, especially 69-74. On page 74, Fletcher-Louis catalogs the evidence from *Sirach* which suggests that the high priest Simon is assimilated to the preexistent Lady Wisdom. *Sirach* 24:8-11 applies to Lady Wisdom the images and themes of the holy tent, taking root, cedar in Lebanon, cypress, rosebushes, olive tree, growth beside water, and incense. Cf. the parallel images of Simon in *Sirach* 50:5, 8-9, 10, and 12, which include the themes of the sanctuary, a rooted shoot, cedar in Lebanon, cypress, roses, olive tree, growth beside water, and incense.

parallel to the *Philippians* 2 Christological hymn). In *1 Enoch* 48:1-5 and 62:4-7, 9 the Son of Man (Enoch) is worshipped by all beings in heaven and in earth. In *3 Enoch* 48C: 10, Enoch is explicitly identified with the Word of God alluded to in *Isaiah* 55:11. Ezekiel the Tragedian in his *Exagoge* and ancient Jewish *Orphica* give comparable hymns on the apotheosis of Moses. The *Testament of Moses* 1:14 assumes the preexistence of Moses (who is assimilated to the Logos), just as the hymn in *Colossians* 1:115ff. projects into pre-eternity not only the Logos as such, but also the historically incarnate "Christ Jesus."

The incarnate Christ's "exclusivism," we repeat, can conceivably be of such a nature as to be able to include an aspect or mode of "augmentation," precisely on account of the unlimited divine nature of the uncreated Logos; that is, Christ's exclusivism is plenary, not restrictive, and hence it is essentially inclusive. If the cosmos is created and re-created in the Logos, the same can be said of the Holy Spirit, that is, of Wisdom. Additionally, one must be careful to understand the implicate inclusivity of scriptural and traditional exclusivism. For instance, if Jewish tradition states that God created the cosmos for the sake of David, it also maintains the same with regard to other Old Testament worthies; the *Gospel of Thomas* 12 continues this tradition, for in this logion Christ says that the cosmos came into being for the sake of James the Just. There is no contradiction in this regard either in the Talmud or in *Thomas* over against the Christian doctrine which holds that all things were created in and for the Logos. Similarly, Philo assimilates more than one Hebrew prophet to the heavenly Logos, and even calls these various prophets *theos* (though not *ho theos*; *John* 1:1 similarly avoids the definite article and calls the Logos *theos*, not *ho theos*). Traditional religious proclamations delivered in exclusivist language must therefore often be understood in inclusive and polyvalent senses, and ultimately in a "transvalent" sense when the Logos is involved. If the cosmos is re-created by Christ's sacrifice (*Colossians* 1:20), nevertheless the sacrifice of the Logos cannot be restrictively identified with Golgotha, for even the Christian scriptures teach that the Logos as Lamb has been "slain from the beginning of the world" (*Apocalypse* 13:8), though of course this verse may be understood legitimately in a variety of senses

which do not exclude the historical dimension of Golgotha.¹⁶ *Zohar* II:239b applies an Old Testament verse, which the Church Fathers relate to Christ's crucifixion, to the protological celestial Messiah: "'He hath washed his garments in wine,' even from the time of the Creation. . . . The 'spirit of God which hovered over the face of the waters' (*Gen.* I, 2) is the spirit of the Messiah, and from the time of the Creation he 'washed his garments in celestial wine.'"¹⁷

For the sake of completeness it would be necessary to recall that the understanding of the cross as a cosmic atoning sacrifice of renewal is a specifically Pauline contribution to Christian theology; this understanding of the cross appears to have been unknown in Jewish Christianity under St. James, hence the complete absence of the cross or any mention at all of Christ's death in works such as the *Epistle of James*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache*, to name only a few.

Few Christian theologians seem to have been deeply struck by the fact that the Church's earliest Eucharistic rite, which is preserved in the *Didache*, contains not a single reference to either the cross or to the death of Christ. The temptation to reinterpret the *Didache's* Eucharistic liturgy as a mere *agape*, or Christian social "love feast," is essentially the result of the Great Church's theologians' ignorance concerning the absence of the Pauline understanding of the cross in primitive Jewish Christianity. We might also observe that whoever wrote *2 Peter* (the most ancient Church Fathers' doubts and even outright rejection of its Petrine authorship are well known), this author never once

¹⁶ For a parallel from a primordial religion regarding the protological divine sacrifice, consider the *Edda* mythic poem "Havamal," which we here translate from the Old Norse: "138. I know that I hung / upon the wind-swept tree / nights all through nine, / spear-pierced / and sacrificed to Odin, / myself to myself, / whence sprung / none knows, aged / the roots of the tree. 139. They helped me with no bread / nor with mead-horn. . . . 143. [B]efore the beginning; / there he rose up, / where he afterwards did come." In this sacred poem, Odin the All-Father (which the Neoplatonists would have understood as the demiurge or Logos) suffers on the World Tree (138-39) and then rises from death (143).

¹⁷ *The Zohar*. Tr. by Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, Paul P. Levertoff, vol. 2 (London/New York: Soncino Press, 1984), 363-64.

refers to either the cross or to Christ's death, and this despite the curious positive reference to Paul in 3:15; and in 1:16ff., where one would naturally expect a reference to the resurrection of Christ, we instead find an account of the transfiguration upon Mount Tabor. This is explained if *2 Peter* is a Jewish-Christian document, for we know from the Jewish-Christian *Apocalypse of Peter* that the transfiguration was assimilated to the ascension of Christ. Neither is there any reference to Christ's death or cross in the *Epistle of Jude*, which is intimately related to *2 Peter*.

Jewish Christianity placed the emphasis upon the cross as the exaltation, not as the death, of Christ. In this respect, the *Gospel of John*, which identifies the cross with Christ's glorification and ascent to God, eminently agrees in spirit with the Jewish-Christian paradigm.¹⁸ The same could be said, *mutatis mutandi*, of the Qur'an's insistence that Christ was not truly slain, but was raised to God (sura 4:157-58). These dialectical "clashes" having to do with Christ's earthly end are precisely what gave rise to the early Gnostic speculations regarding the nature of Christ's sufferings, speculations which are not always intrinsically heretical. We read the following words of Christ in chapter 101 of the ancient *Acts of John*, which is not a heretical Gnostic, but an orthodox apocryphal work: "Thou hearest that I suffered, yet did I not suffer; that I suffered not, yet did I suffer; that I was pierced, yet I was not smitten; hanged, and I was not hanged;¹⁹ that blood flowed from me, and it flowed not; and, in a word, what they say of me, that befell me not, but what they say not, that did I suffer" (M. R. James version).

The Jewish work *4 Maccabees* demonstrates that even in a Jewish context the death of a martyr could be viewed as an atoning sacrifice which effects expiation for the sins of the people and purification of the land. *4 Maccabees* 17:21-22 states of the Maccabean martyrs: "The tyrant was punished, and the

¹⁸ We have gathered the relevant evidence on this topic in our monograph, *The Abrahamic Religious Archetype: Essays on the Transcendent and Formal Relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, specifically in the chapter titled, "Dialectical Synthesis of Qur'anic and Gospel Narratives: Crucifixion as Ascension."

¹⁹ The word "hanged" might suggest that this text relies on Jewish-Christian tradition.

nation was purified, they [the martyrs] becoming like a ransom for our nation's sin. By means of these devoted ones' blood and through their death as an expiation, divine Providence preserved Israel... ." However, no devout Jew would imagine that the expiation of sin effected by the Maccabean martyrs would annul in any way the need for the Mosaic sacrifices for sin; *Matthew* 5:17-18 forcefully demonstrates that neither would Jesus ever have advocated the abrogation of the Mosaic sacrifices for Jews,²⁰ for nothing of the Torah will pass away until the end of the cosmos. James, who led Jewish Christianity after Christ's earthly departure, and the twelve apostles, felt the same as Christ in this regard; thus Peter, along with the entire early Church in Jerusalem, continued attending daily Temple services, which would have involved traditional sin sacrifices, even after the miracle of Pentecost (*Acts* 2:46), and Paul performed purification sacrifices in the Temple years into his Messianic ministry (*Acts* 21:26). Jewish Christianity therefore saw no contradiction between Christ's atonement and the continuance of the Temple sacrifices for sin;²¹ according to this perspective, Christ's expiation, like

²⁰ In Judaism, the Mosaic sacrifices were never required of non-Jews; the salvation of the latter was assured by their observance of the universal moral laws as established by Noah for the nations (known as the Noachide laws), the same general laws promulgated at the first apostolic council as recorded in *Acts* 15. Since Judaism has never held that a pious Gentile need convert to Judaism in order to be saved, the gospels never record any instance where Christ demands a Gentile to become a Jew. Christ condemned the concept of converting to a religion; one converts to God, not to a religion, the latter would be a form of idolatry: "You go round about the sea and the land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, you make him the child of hell twofold more than yourselves" (*Matthew* 23:15). One converts to God, one *enters* a religion. In *Matthew* 28:20, Christ does not direct his disciples to go out into the world to gain converts for a new religion; he very clearly commands them as follows: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

²¹ The perspective of the *Letter to the Hebrews*, which argues against the continuance of the Mosaic sacrifices, must be understood as applying either only to Gentiles who had needlessly entered Judaism or to certain Jewish Christians who wished to impose the Torah obligations upon Gentile Christians. The epistle in question therefore naturally contains certain limitative perspectives; for instance, to the objection in 9:26, "For then he [Christ] ought to have suffered often from the beginning of the world," one could answer that according

the expiation of sin effected through the Maccabean martyrs, could not abrogate the Mosaic sacrifices for sin, which God has ordained as obligatory for Jews until the end of the world.²² From a Pauline perspective there exists a universal aspect in the need for sacrificial expiation. Accordingly, whereas the sins of Jews are covered by the Mosaic sacrifices (not apart, of course, from the Lamb's eternal sacrifice), the Gentiles stand in need of sacrifice also, but being non-Jews the Mosaic ordinances are inapplicable to them; therefore their need of sacrifice is met by the Messianic sacrifice, and this insight constitutes Paul's central contribution to Christian theology. But just as the Jewish-Christian Mosaic obligations must not be thrust upon the Gentiles, conversely, neither should Pauline theology nor the Gentile-Christian freedom from the Torah's obligations be thrust upon Jewish Christians.

The purpose of this brief excursus upon Jewish Christianity has been to indicate that the cosmic understanding of the cross in the new creation is a specifically Pauline interpretation of the Christic mystery, admittedly valid in its own domain, but by no means can it be considered absolute or universal for the entirety of the Church. Erwin Preuschen writes in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*: "Origen's concept of the Logos allowed him to make no definite statement on the redemptive work of Jesus. . . . Origen regarded the death of Jesus as a sacrifice, paralleling it with other cases of self-sacrifice for the general good" (vol. 8, 273). However, it is not the case, as Preuschen avers, that Origen deviated from the Church on the subject of Christ's death and the redemption, it is rather that Origen reflects a stream of tradition emanating from the early

to *Apocalypse* 13:8 the Lamb has indeed been slain and suffered from the foundation of the world.

²² We by no means imply a strict equivalency in this regard for Christian theology, for none of the Maccabean martyrs was the Messiah. On the other hand, one might arguably hold that their martyrdom *prefigured* that of the Messiah's, and perhaps even that their martyrdom in some analogical sense "reflected" on the earthly plane the protological celestial sacrifice of the Messiah, who has been slain from the foundation of the world; the slain Abel would be the first Jewish scriptural prototype in this regard.

Church which through a legitimate theological diversity did not fully encompass the Pauline understanding of the cross. Origen's Neoplatonic training is obvious; but his extensive personal contacts with Jews and Jewish Christians are also well known, and it is also here and not only in Neoplatonic influence that we must seek an explanation for Origen's non-Pauline views of the cross. Other typical Jewish and Jewish-Christian doctrines found in Origen's theology include the idea of the preexistent soul of the Messiah, the preexistence of souls in general, transmigration of souls, *Apokatastasis* (Judaism knows nothing of an eternal hell), and "subordinationist" Christology and Pneumatology. That many of these Jewish doctrines have parallels in Neoplatonism would have only increased their appeal to Origen.

The early stream of Christian tradition which Origen reflects in his understanding of the cross emanated ultimately from the Jerusalem church under St. James, a tradition which by the mid-first century CE found its way into Syrian theology; the earliest surviving witness to this theology is contained in the *Gospel of Thomas*, extant in Greek fragments and in a complete Coptic version. This ancient text represents a Syrian adaptation of an Aramaic gospel from Jerusalem, composed ca. 30-50 CE.²³

²³ See Gilles Quispel, "Gnosis and Alchemy: the Tabula Smaragdina," in Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (eds.), *From Poinandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition* (Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2000), 321, 331. In order to explain its "Hermetic" logia Quispel posits also a later Alexandrian revision of the *Thomas* gospel, but what Quispel sees as Hellenistic Hermetic thought from Alexandria could just as easily be explained as Jewish Kabbalistic components emanating from a first-century Jerusalem context. The recent work of Moshe Idel has established that the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition is already present, to various degrees, in ancient Jewish Palestinian sources, and by no means originates only from the later medieval periods, when it was but fully systematized. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988). On the Jerusalem origins of the *Thomas* gospel, see also Thomas Zöckler, *Jesu Lehren im Thomasevangelium* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999). Zöckler accepts Quispel's thesis of a later Hellenistic revision of *Thomas*. We do not doubt that this gospel, like the four canonical gospels, underwent various redactional developments, but we do contest the certitude with which these developments are geographically situated by scholars. Given the regular contact between ancient Jews in Alexandria and Jerusalem, "Alexandrian" thought

April D. DeConick explains the relationship between not only the churches of Jerusalem and Syria, but also the contrast between Syrian and Roman theology by observing that Syrian traditions have “strong roots” in Jerusalem; that Pauline theology was in large part neglected in the early Syrian churches, which resulted in a general absence of the Pauline theology of the cross as found in Rome. Syrian theology thus possessed a greater genetic relationship with the early Jerusalem church than with Gnosticism.²⁴

DeConick further remarks that early Syrian Christians “tried to imitate Jesus’ crucifixion which they understood differently from Western Christians. To them, Jesus’ crucifixion was the ultimate example of a person crucifying the flesh and its appetites. . . .”²⁵ This conception is certainly found in early Syriac works such as the *Liber Graduum*, a text to which DeConick often refers, but this same scholar claims that the idea of the imitation of Christ’s crucifixion is also found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. DeConick is naturally aware of the scholarly consensus which holds that the *Thomas* gospel is either unaware of or unconcerned with Jesus’ crucifixion; on the basis, however, of logia 28, 55, and 77 (joined with 30 in the Greek version), she contests the prevailing view. Logia 28 and 77 (+30), however, do not explicitly mention Christ’s death; DeConick resorts to allegorical interpretation in order to see the cross in these logia, and so they cannot constitute solid or sound scholarly evidence in the *Thomas* gospel for a belief in Christ’s death, by crucifixion or by any other method.

For example, in logion 30, DeConick sees a reference to the stone sealing Christ’s burial cave and to the wood of the cross: “Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.” Even allegorically this would seem a strange

was already present in first-century Jerusalem, so that “Alexandrian” thought in a document such as *Thomas* does not necessitate a geographically Alexandrian provenance for the work.

²⁴ April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas. With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

conception of Christ's death and resurrection, for the resurrection would precede the cross, given that logion 30 mentions the stone before the wood, although the Coptic reverses the order. More problematical, however, is the fact that according to the canonical gospels, after the stone is "rolled away" (not "lifted") from the burial cave, Christ is precisely *not* present, having been resurrected, whereas logion 30 states: "Lift the stone and *you will find me there.*" The correct exegesis of logion 30, which is evident from its placement in both the Greek and Coptic versions, is that Christ as the *Shekhinah* of God is universally present in the sacred space of the liturgical cosmos (Greek version) or, alternatively, as the manifestation of the primordial Light and Logos, Christ universally pervades the physical cosmos (Coptic version). First we give the Greek version according to DeConick, with our own explanatory material in brackets: "Jesus said, 'Where there are three people [gathered together in prayer or for Torah meditation], God is there. And where there is one alone, I say that I am with him. Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.'" The point is that in prayer one must seek diligently to uncover the hidden presence of God, and that in Torah meditation one must discover the hidden esoteric scriptural truths. The Coptic version reads: "Jesus said, 'I am the light which is above all things. I am everything. From me, everything came forth, and up to me, everything reached. Lift the stone and you will find me there. Split the piece of wood and I am there.'" Here the divine Light (= Logos) pervades the cosmos. To the Greek and Coptic versions, we might add Qur'an sura 2:115: "Unto God belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God. Lo! God is All-Embracing, All-Knowing." DeConick's claim that logion 28's phrase, "And my soul suffered in pain for human beings" might refer to Jesus' crucifixion (see p. 133) is no more convincing than is her allegorical interpretation of logia 30 and 77. The same *Thomas* gospel, in DeConick's translation, uses the word "crucify" exclusively as a metaphor for the internal conflict between *sarx* and *psyche* (logia 87 and 112). All previous translators render logia 87 and 112 with "depend," "rely," or a close equivalent, rather than with "crucify." DeConick's translation suggestion does seem to make sense, but even if it is correct,

this would apparently help to disconfirm her interpretation of logion 28 as containing a reference to Christ's physical crucifixion, for the only instances of the word "crucify" in the *Thomas* gospel clearly would refer to a strictly internal conflict between the flesh and the soul. In fact, the immediately following logion 29 suggests that logion 28's reference to Christ's suffering in his "soul" for human beings indeed alludes to a strictly interior "crucifixion," for logion 29 closely mirrors the conflict of *sarx* and *psyche* found in logia 87 and 112: "Jesus said, 'If the flesh [*sarx*] existed for the sake of the Spirit [*pneuma*], it would be a miracle. If the Spirit (existed) for the sake of the body [*soma*], it would be a miracle of miracles! Nevertheless, I marvel at how this great wealth settled in this poverty.'" Logion 29 describes the "incarnation," not the crucifixion, and that logion 28 speaks of the internal sufferings of the "incarnate" Christ, rather than of the crucified Christ, is suggested by logion 28's very first line: "Jesus said, 'I stood in the midst of the world and I appeared to them in flesh.'" In *Thomas*, reflecting Semitic anthropological vocabularic usage, the terms *pneuma* and *psyche* would seem to be roughly synonymous, as would also *sarx* and *soma*. The terms in *Thomas* are not to be understood in the strict Greek philosophical sense of material body as opposed to immaterial spirit, but rather as the contingent order or nature in contrast with the divine order or nature; in other words, we have here a contrast between the created and the uncreated orders of reality.

This leaves us with logion 55: "Jesus says, 'Whoever does not hate his father and mother cannot be my disciple; and whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and carry his cross as I do is not worthy of me.'" However else this logion might be interpreted, at the strictly literal level the cross here functions as a metaphor, not as a reference to a physical execution by crucifixion. Logion 55's cross pertains to the earthly ministry of the Messiah, not to his earthly end; by using the most graphic image of death then known, namely, Roman crucifixion, Christ here alludes to the practice of "mortifying" familial relationships which would interfere with one's communion with God. We conclude, therefore, that just as in the *Epistle of James*, so in the *Gospel of Thomas* there is a complete silence regarding any death of Jesus. The only mention of a cross in the *Thomas* gospel

represents a metaphor which is equally applicable to Jesus and to his disciples, so that the present consensus of scholarship concerning the absence of the crucifixion in *Thomas* stands justified. In Jewish-Christian texts such as *Thomas*, as in the Qur'an, the emphasis lies not on the crucifixion, but rather on the ascended Christ.

The Pauline doctrine of the cross may be an "absolute" imperative for the Gentile churches, but the New Testament record implies another inspired trajectory of Messianic faith, represented above all by St. James. The clear conflicts between James and Paul, which were never denied by the Church Fathers,²⁶ reflect the tensions resulting from a dialectical complementarity, not from any absolute contradiction; yet in the final analysis the two trajectories can only be reconciled at the intellectual level, for on the formal plane these divergences, like the various religions, must retain their individual specificities of self- and group-identification, which are based upon their legitimate theological diversity. The latter diversity is difficult for Christian theologians to recognize, for the New Testament primarily (though not exclusively) consists of works which accord with the Pauline conceptions, or which at least do not openly conflict with Pauline Christianity; almost all the writings of Jewish Christianity perished principally for reasons of climate (humidity) and ostracism before the Great Church established its scriptural canon (or more accurately "canons," since there is no universal agreement in the churches on the matter). The *Book of Acts*, moreover, reflecting its Pauline sources, de-emphasizes St. James' role of primacy in the Church, so that the Jacobean theology can be recovered only indirectly in this source, as in the New Testament in general.²⁷

²⁶ For example, Victorinus writes in his *Commentary on Galatians*: "But clearly Paul was not able to learn anything from James, for the latter possessed a different view of the Gospel. . . . James was not an apostle, and he may even have been in heresy. Now Paul does record that he saw James: 'I saw the novelty that James was spreading around and preaching, but because I knew and spurned his blasphemy, you Galatians should also reject it.'"

²⁷ See Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (NY: Continuum, 1999), 98-99. We are referring here solely to Küng's historical survey rather

It is often asked, what became of the Jewish Christians? Although there are what could in a sense be called Jewish Christians who survive in Ethiopia and India, nevertheless their rites and theology as they exist today do not fully correspond with their ancient forms, having been significantly assimilated to the Great Church through the influence of various missionaries throughout the centuries. The Ethiopic Church, about 45 million strong, celebrates both Saturday and Sunday as holy days, practices obligatory circumcision, does not allow the consumption of pork, and has in the Old Testament canon such works as the *Book of Enoch* and the *Book of Jubilees*; yet although the Ethiopic Church has preserved many precious Jewish-Christian “apocryphal” works, these are not included in their New Testament canon. According to its own tradition, this church descends from Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem in 70 CE. The virtual disappearance from history of primitive Jewish Christianity’s traces can be attributed to the fact that after the destruction of the Temple, these groups fled to areas where their precious manuscripts, as we have mentioned, would perish from humidity (which in part explains why the New Testament contains works principally reflecting the Pauline theology), not to mention the Gentile-Christian misunderstanding of Jewish-Christian theology which resulted in the latter group’s excommunication by the Great Church in the East and West, and the intentional destruction of Jewish-Christian literature, including the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac Jewish-Christian gospels, fragments of which survive only in brief quotations by the Church Fathers, and which were incorporated, often in slightly to heavily redacted forms, throughout the four canonical gospels of the Gentile church. We suspect that many Jewish Christians eventually entered Islam, given the profound and extensive archetypal correspondences between the two groups. This also to a great extent would explain the disappearance from history of an entire sector of the Church. Lastly, we would also propose that large numbers of the Islamic traditions of Jesus’ sayings, which

than to his theological assessments of the historical events in question.

literally run into the hundreds,²⁸ were introduced to Muslims by Jewish Christians who had entered Islam, and that these 'Isa *ahadith* (Jesus traditions) preserve, in varying degrees, passages from the lost Jewish-Christian gospels or oral traditions. Frithjof Schuon writes of Jewish Christianity and its relation to Islam in the following manner: "[A] Judaizing Christianity is possible. . . . We are the first to admit that Mosaism had the right to survive—the advent of Islam is, paradoxically, an indirect proof of this. . . ." Furthermore, "Saint Paul inaugurated the 'de-Judaization' of Christianity; now one could conceive of a Christianity faithful to at least the fundamental prescriptions of Moses, and this Christianity has existed in fact. . . ." Lastly, "[t]he excessively unilateral interpretation of the 'Old Law' . . . derive[s] from the Epistles and not from the Gospel."²⁹

Nicolas of Cusa obtained his theology of the providential diversity of religions by applying analogically the contemporary astronomical model of many world systems to the domain of revelation; today we would also refer to "solar systems."³⁰ In each solar system the sun around which its planets orbit is the absolute center. Yet from a larger angle of vision, one discovers that there are other solar systems, and in each the central star is the absolute center. Yet this quality of absoluteness obviously possesses an aspect of relativity. In the center of each religious "solar system," the Logos has manifested Itself as one of the various central suns, or Prophets, or incarnations (*avatars* in Hindu terminology). Each system is perceived at the local level as absolute, and the particular system is therefore identified from this locally limited view as the entirety of the spiritual cosmos. The Logos'

²⁸ In addition to the Shi'ite compilation cited elsewhere in this study, various Jesus *ahadith* have been assembled in Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus. Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁹ These passages are culled from Frithjof Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*. Tr. by Gustavo Polit and Deborah Lambert (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1982), pages 123-125.

³⁰ For an overview of Nicolas of Cusa's thought in this regard, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated by Mario Domandi (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963).

aspect of absoluteness to a certain extent justifies the impression, within each local system, of self-contained absoluteness. By analogy, the Pauline system cannot constitute the entirety of the Christian cosmos, let alone the entirety of the wider religious cosmos which embraces the diverse world religions. Aquinas' understanding of the unicity of Christ's role in creation and new creation is in essence refined, not contradicted, by the application of Nicolas of Cusa's analogy of revelation and the multiplicity of world systems. Without having resolved all of the theological tensions involved in the matter, we would nevertheless suggest, based on the evidence presented, that it would at the very least not be intrinsically inappropriate to posit that for Christian theology not only is it possible, but it might also be fitting, for there to be incarnation/s after Christ.

* * *

ST 3, 3, article 8. Whether it was more fitting that the Person of the Son rather than any other Divine Person should assume human nature?

I answer that, It was most fitting that the Person of the Son should become incarnate. First, on the part of the union; for such as are similar are fittingly united. Now the Person of the Son, Who is the Word of God, has a certain common agreement with all creatures, because the word of the craftsman, i.e. his concept, is an exemplar likeness of whatever is made by him. Hence the Word of God, Who is His eternal concept, is the exemplar likeness of all creatures. And therefore as creatures are established in their proper species, though movably, by the participation of this likeness, so by the non-participated and personal union of the Word with a creature, it was fitting that the creature should be restored in order to its eternal and unchangeable perfection; for the craftsman by the intelligible form of his art, whereby he fashioned his handiwork, restores it when it has fallen into ruin. Moreover, He has a particular agreement with human nature since the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from Whom all man's wisdom is derived. And hence man is

perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master. Hence it is said (Sirach 1:5): "The Word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom." And hence for the consummate perfection of man it was fitting that the very Word of God should be personally united to human nature.

Thirdly, the reason for this fitness may be taken from the sin of our first parent, for which Incarnation supplied the remedy. For the first man sinned by seeking knowledge, as is plain from the words of the serpent, promising to man the knowledge of good and evil. Hence it was fitting that by the Word of true knowledge man might be led back to God, having wandered from God through an inordinate thirst for knowledge.

Reply to Objection 2. The first creation of things was made by the power of God the Father through the Word; hence the second creation ought to have been brought about through the Word, by the power of God the Father, in order that restoration should correspond to creation according to 2 Cor. 5:19: "For God indeed was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Article 8 must be set within the greater context of *tertia pars* 3, which elsewhere clearly asserts that in addition to the Logos' incarnational potentialities, the Holy Spirit can also become incarnate. In order to understand more fully the argumentation contained in article 8 regarding the superlative fittingness of the Son's incarnation, we cite the following passage from Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles* IV: 12, which bears the title, "How the Son of God is called the Wisdom of God":

Wisdom in man is a habit whereby our mind is perfected in the knowledge of the highest truths: such are divine truths. Wisdom in God is His knowledge of Himself. But because He does not know Himself by any presentation of Himself other than His essence, and His act of understanding is His

essence, the wisdom of God cannot be a habit, but is the very essence of God. But the Son of God is the Word and Concept of God understanding Himself. The Word of God, thus conceived, is properly called ‘begotten Wisdom’; hence the Apostle names Christ the *wisdom of God* (1 Cor. i, 24). This Word of wisdom, conceived in the mind, is a manifestation of the wisdom of the mind which thereby understands: as in us acts are a manifestation of habits. Also the divine wisdom is called ‘light’, as consisting in a pure act of knowledge; and the manifestation of light is the brightness thence proceeding: the Word of divine wisdom therefore is fittingly called the ‘brightness of light’, according to the text: *being the brightness of his glory* (Heb. i, 3). But though the Son, or Word of God, is properly called ‘conceived wisdom’, nevertheless the name of Wisdom, when used absolutely, must be common to the Father and the Son; since the wisdom that is resplendent through the Word is the essence of the Father, and the essence of the Father is common to Him with the Son.

Regarding this passage, although it stresses, as does *ST* 3, 3, article 8, the identification of the Wisdom of God with Jesus Christ, nevertheless, Aquinas ends by clearly asserting that the designation or name “Wisdom” cannot be applied exclusively or restrictively to the eternal Logos. This suggests the connotative possibility that the Holy Spirit is also Wisdom, and a further connotative point presents itself, based on Aquinas’ teaching in *tertia pars* 3 on the possibility of a multiplicity of Logos incarnations, namely, that the Holy Spirit as Wisdom could hypostatically unite with a multiplicity of human beings. Furthermore, regarding article 8, Aquinas’ comments can be qualified by amplifying the biblical references pertaining to the matter dealt with in the context. Aquinas writes that it was most fitting for the Son to become incarnate firstly because the Son is the Word of God which was the means through which God the Father effected creation, and secondly because Wisdom, which is the nature and goal of humanity, participates in the Word of God. The first point to make is that according to the Jewish scriptures, not only does the masculine Word participate in

the act of creation, but the feminine Wisdom (the Holy Spirit) equally participates in the act of cosmic manifestation. The scriptural references for Lady Wisdom will suffice to establish her role in creation: *Proverbs* 8:22-31; *Wisdom* 7:22-8:1; *Sirach* 24:1-22. These scriptures can be augmented by referring to St Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses* IV 20:1, a passage which refers to the Son and Spirit as God's "own hands" by which He creates: "For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things."³¹ Similarly, Irenaeus in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 10 reinforces our contention that the name Wisdom of God cannot be restrictively or exclusively applied to the Word: "Now this God is glorified by His Word who is His Son continually, and by the Holy Spirit who is the Wisdom of the Father of all." Based on the relevant biblical passages and Irenaeus, a saint who has profoundly influenced eastern and western theology to the present day, one could justly argue that "Wisdom" as a name is directly and most properly applicable to the Holy Spirit, whereas "Wisdom" is indirectly and "less" properly (but not "improperly") a name of the Word. Naturally Word and Wisdom both interpenetrate each other as divine hypostatic realities, and each share in the other's "divinity" in plenary mode; yet the degrees of properness and fittingness with regard to their respective names cannot be canceled out on account of such plenary hypostatic "mutuality."

Scripture furthermore indicates that the creative Word and Wisdom are roughly synonymous, which suggests that in one sense Word and Wisdom must represent respectively a masculine and a feminine modality of a single divine reality. *Wisdom* 9:1-2: "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy Word, and by thy Wisdom hast formed man. . . ." If this text is a specimen of Hebraic poetic synonymous paral-

³¹ Compare Qur'an sura 38:76: "He said: O Iblis! What hindereth thee from falling prostrate before that [Adam] which I have created with both My hands?" A metaphysical interpretation might understand the two hands of God in the Qur'anic context as the "Mother" and the "Book," as found in the phrase *Umm al-Kitab*, "Mother of the Book," a term which by constituting a pair of feminine and masculine figures, precisely parallels the biblical Logos and Sophia.

lelism, we could conclude that the Word and Wisdom, though not identical with each other in every respect, are inseparable in the work of creation. Again, if it be countered that the Son is the Wisdom of God, we recall that Aquinas himself relativizes this identification, for Wisdom must pertain in some sense to all the divine “persons” or “hypostases.” The second point to make is that it is most fitting that the masculine Word hypostatically unite with a human of the male gender, and that the feminine Wisdom hypostatically unite with a human of the female gender. Of course, on the celestial plane, the “gender” of the Logos or of Sophia is a metaphorical or symbolical reality. Yet the physical genders manifest in fitting and proper ways the non-physical and symbolical “gender” realities inherent in the celestial realm. This argumentation is supported by the fact that sacred scripture makes use of the physical genders in order to describe celestial realities; in this context we recall the various passages in the Jewish scriptures which treat of the feminine figure of Lady Wisdom and of the masculine figure of the Messiah. The Qur’anic *Umm* and *Kitab*, Mother and Book, should also be recalled in this context; the two terms correspond to Wisdom and Word respectively.

Furthermore, it is necessary to augment Aquinas’ argumentation regarding the fittingness of the Logos’ incarnation in relation to the “transgression” of Adam. Clearly, sacred scripture, beginning with *Genesis* 3, ascribes the primordial “transgression” to both Adam and Eve. Paul, however, accentuates the woman’s role in the “fall” in *1 Timothy* 2:14: “And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression.” And it is surely noteworthy that shortly after the majestic speech of Lady Wisdom in *Sirach* 24, we read in 25:33: “From the woman came the beginning of sin, and by her we all die.” Lady Wisdom thus constitutes the divine antidote to the “fallen” Eve; or as St Irenaeus would later write, the sinless Virgin Mary became the advocate of sinful Eve. Now if the incarnation of the male Logos was fitting and necessary in order to repair the ruin caused by Adam, so the incarnation of the female Sophia would have been fitting and necessary in order to repair the ruin caused by Eve, and there is ample connotative evidence in St Irenaeus’

doctrine of the two Eves (Eve and Mary) to justify this paradigm theologically, though all artificial schematization in this regard must naturally be avoided.³² According to *Wisdom* 10:1, Lady Wisdom “delivered him [Adam] from his transgression.” Here is scriptural support for the idea that not only the Logos participates in the reversal of the ruin of humanity, but also that Sophia shares in the work of restoration; that this mutual restoration by the male Logos and the female Sophia is proper and fitting is implied by the very fact of the subsistence of humanity in male and female modalities. In short, the main lines of argumentation in ST 3, 3, a 8 regarding the Logos’ role in creation and restoration can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Lady Wisdom, that is, to the Holy Spirit; and this would constitute a Marian augmentation of, not necessarily a correction to, the Thomistic Logos paradigm under consideration. If “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (*John* 1:17), Mary is the plenitude and thus source of such grace: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (*Luke* 1:28).³³

A certain priority of Mary in the restoration of the primordial ruin is in fact implied by her role as the New Eve, for *1 Timothy* 2:14 and *Sirach* 25:33, reflecting the *Genesis* 3 account, assign the principal origin or beginning of sin and death to Eve,

³² It is possible that Paul in *Romans* 5 by the phrase “one man,” which refers to Adam, simultaneously also includes implicitly Eve; this same chapter’s reference to the “one man” Christ could also implicitly embrace Mary as New Eve.

³³ Mary is Mother of the Word, or in Qur’anic terms, *Umm al-Kitab*, Mother of the Book. More precisely, Mary is “hypostatically” united with the *Umm al-Kitab*. Mary is full of grace and full of wisdom, for she is the divine Grace and Wisdom. One finds the term *Umm al-Kitab* thrice in the Qur’an; two of the ayat in question transparently understand the term in a hypostatic sense, namely, 13:39: “God effaceth what He will, and establisheth, and with Him is the Mother of the Book”; and 43:4, cited above. The third instance, 3:7, which specifies that the plain statements of the Qur’an, as opposed to the allegorical ayat, constitute the Mother of the Book, can also be understood in the same basic sense found in the other two ayat, admittedly with a different nuance. The emphasis upon “plain,” or “apparent,” simply accentuates the “tendency” of the unmanifest Matrix (*Umm*) to project herself upon the level of “appearance,” or of “manifestation” on the “visible” plane, this “appearance” being precisely the manifest *Kitab*.

and exonerate the man Adam entirely from the ultimate “originative” role. As Eve had priority in the fall, so it is proper and fitting that Mary, the New Eve, have priority in the restoration, and this priority is implied by the very fact that Mary is not the *spouse*, but the *Mother* of the New Adam, Christ. The beginning and origin of the restoration is from the New Eve, not the New Adam, though again, since there is no “competition” involved, one must avoid all artificial schematization in the contrastive paradigm at hand. One could note, moreover, an important priority of Christ over the Virgin in Islamic theology, for which Christ is a *rasul*, a Messenger or Apostle, who delivers a divine Law or founds a religion, whereas Mary is but a *nabiyah*, a Prophetess who does not deliver a divine Law or found a religion. According to a *hadith*, no woman has ever founded a religion. This is understandable, given that holy women of the highest order, and Mary is superlatively such according to Islamic theology, can be viewed as manifestations on the earthly plane of the celestial Lady Wisdom, or *Umm al-Kitab*, that is, the Mother of the Book (Logos). This is to say that Mary is a theophany of the formless Matrix (*Umm*), and in accord with her formless essence, or supraformal Sophianic nature, it is not fitting that she establish a religion, which is formal and “formalistic” by definition; the establishment of the latter is the task of the *Kitab* (Logos), Jesus in this context, who does not represent esoterism or Inwardness as such (as does Mary), but rather esoteric wisdom, which is a modality of the esoteric Matrix. This is one reason why Christ is in a certain sense divine Wisdom “indirectly”; Lady Wisdom, who is the Mother of the Book, is Wisdom directly, and she gives birth to the Book, or Logos. Christ is Wisdom insofar as he issues forth from the Mother who is Wisdom, so that Christ is *Filius Sapientiae*; yet in virtue of his emergence from the divine Wisdom, who is his mother Mary, and especially given the additional fact that Christ has no earthly father, Paul can rightly speak of “Christ, the Wisdom of God,” not to mention the fact that both divine hypostases participate essentially in the plenitude of Wisdom. The Word naturally participates in the nature of his mother, who is Wisdom. Given this formless Sophianic matrix which Christ prolongs in his own

person, it is understandable that the religion he founds, Christianity, has a tendency to reduce outward religious forms and commandments to a minimum.³⁴ One could, however, observe that for this comparison to be complete, the fact must be taken into account that although Mary is not a Messenger, she is the Mother of all Messengers and is herself, according to Ruzbihan Baqli (a 12th-century Persian Sufi), the Substance of Sanctity, the very sancity of the Prophetic Messengers.

Here we refer to *ST prima pars* 41 article 3 in order to set into their proper contexts the eternal and temporal dimensions of the Word and Wisdom of God:

Reply to Objection 4. When we say “Wisdom was created,” this may be understood not of Wisdom which is the Son of God, but of created wisdom given by God to creatures: for it is said, “He created her [namely, Wisdom] in the Holy Ghost, and He poured her out over all His works” (*Sirach* 1:9-10). Nor is it inconsistent for Scripture in one text to speak of the Wisdom begotten and wisdom created, for wisdom created is a kind of participation of the uncreated Wisdom. The saying may also be referred to the created nature assumed by the Son, so that the sense be, “From the beginning and before the world was I made”—that is, I was foreseen as united to the creature.

³⁴ In this spirit, Aquinas concludes in *ST* 2, 108, a.2: “The right use of grace is by means of works of charity. These, in so far as they are essential to virtue, pertain to the moral precepts, which also formed part of the Old Law. Hence, in this respect, the New Law had nothing to add as regards external action. The determination of these works in their relation to the divine worship, belongs to the ceremonial precepts of the Law; and, in relation to our neighbor, to the judicial precepts, as stated above (99, 4). And therefore, since these determinations are not in themselves necessarily connected with inward grace wherein the Law consists, they do not come under a precept of the New Law, but are left to the decision of man; some relating to inferiors—as when a precept is given to an individual; others, relating to superiors, temporal or spiritual, referring, namely, to the common good. Accordingly the New Law had no other external works to determine, by prescribing or forbidding, except the sacraments, and those moral precepts which have a necessary connection with virtue, for instance, that one must not kill, or steal, and so forth.”

In the second half of this particular passage, Aquinas subtly opens up an exegetical possibility for applying to uncreated Wisdom various scriptural passages which speak of created Wisdom, for these verses can be interpreted as involving a proleptic view of the incarnation: “‘I was made’—that is, I was foreseen as united to the creature.” In the Reply to Objection 4, Aquinas identifies Wisdom with the Son; yet we again note that the name “Wisdom” most properly designates the Holy Spirit, for the reasons previously presented in the body of this essay.³⁵ Now if we allow the possibility, justified by a connotative interpretation of Aquinas’ doctrine on the possibility of multiple Logos incarnations, that the Mother of Christ was an incarnation of Wisdom, of the Holy Spirit, then we could conclude that the *Sedes Sapientiae*, the Virgin Mary, in a certain sense possesses both an uncreated “divine” (or celestial) nature and a created human nature. And it is indeed suggestive that *Sirach* 24 proclaims that Lady Wisdom is both created and uncreated. Verse 9: “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me . . .”; verse 18b reads in various Greek versions: “Being eternal, I am therefore given unto all my children, unto those who are named by Him.” The two verses can of course be reconciled, for verse 9 already suggests that Wisdom’s creation is effected according to, or in, an “eternal” mode, a modality which verse 18b accentuates. What Christian trinitarian theology terms the Son’s “eternal generation,” the Jewish scriptures might describe equivalently by use of the Semitically more concrete image and word “creation,” and this in its own way reinforces the metaphysical fact that the Father alone (*ho theos*) is neither begotten nor proceeds; as Christ insisted: “Why call me good? None is good but God alone.” If the Virgin is an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, then the following paradigm obtains: Just as there can be no simplistic,

³⁵ We have no intention of criticizing the later Church Fathers for seeing in the Old Testament Lady Wisdom passages the Son rather than the Holy Spirit, nor do we wish to negate their interpretation, which in its own domain is correct for Christian theology; we merely propose that the earliest patristic exegesis which sees Wisdom as the Holy Spirit represents the most direct sense of scripture in this instance, and that this understanding is of apostolic origin, delivered by John to Polycarp, and in turn to Irenaeus.

exhaustive identification between Jesus and the Word, so there could be no simplistic, exhaustive identification between Mary and Wisdom. To ignore the safeguards set in place by Aquinas' doctrine on the multiplicity of Logos incarnations, with its negation of the possibility of any created nature fully or exhaustively circumscribing the divine Logos, would be to commit the sin, in Islamic theological language, of *shirk*, of "association" of the created with the Uncreated. Expressed in positive terminology: The created Mary as incarnation of uncreated Wisdom, that is, Mary's created human nature, by virtue of the hypostatic union involving the Wisdom of God, reveals to us the Face of God. "And whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God" (Qur'an sura 2:115).³⁶

We might better understand the hypostatic union of Mary with the *Sedes Sapientiae* if we observe that because she was predestined in eternity to be the Mother of the Logos, when her freedom and intentionality did not yet exist in temporality, and because she received the Logos directly into her sacred person in time, when her freedom and intentionality existed on the earthly plane, her "intimacy" with the divine nature must therefore exceed the familiarity enjoyed by the faithful in general; of this broader application, 2 *Peter* 1:4 writes: "that you might be made partakers of the divine nature."³⁷ Given the infinite

³⁶ According to theological consensus concerning this aya, "the Face of God" denotes "the Essence of God." Yet we must insist that the obvious outward symbolism of the face suggests that we have here a reference to the immanent Divine Essence's "tendency" to "overflow," in the Plotinian sense, towards cosmic manifestation. If the inward Essence alone were denoted by "Face of God," then the concreteness and visibility implied in the phrase "Whithersoever ye turn," that is, "look," would be unjustified and incongruent with the second half of the aya.

³⁷ Aquinas comments on this verse in ST, 3, 3, 4, ad 3: "An assumption which takes place by the grace of adoption is terminated in a certain participation of the Divine Nature, by an assimilation to Its goodness, according to 2 *Pt.* 1:4: 'That you may be made partakers of the Divine Nature.'" (. . . *assumptio quae fit per gratiam adoptionis terminatur ad quandam participationem divinae naturae secundum assimilationem ad bonitatem illius*). This general participation in the divine order of which Aquinas writes is referred to in the following *hadith* of the Muhammad cited by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq in section 74 of his *Lantern of the*

ontological distance between Mary's created humanity and the "uncreated" Sophia, we cannot understand the Lady Wisdom scriptural passages (*Proverbs* 8, *Sirach* 24) as denoting a hypostatic union of Mary and the Holy Spirit on the plane of the Virgin's "preexistential existence."³⁸ However, the Lady Wisdom passages may be said to connote a preexistential aspect of Marian hypostatic union with Wisdom, especially given the theological hypostatic implications of her title *Sedes Sapientiae*, as previously explicated. Moreover, when we integrate Aquinas' teaching on the non-identity between the Word and the humanity of Christ,³⁹ by analogy if there is a certain "indirectness" in the Marian incarnation of Wisdom, then an element of indirectness also applies in a certain sense to the Christic incarnation of the Word, for neither can the Lady Wisdom scriptures be directly applied, *mutatis mutandi*, to the created humanity of Christ, though of course they can be made to apply *indirectly* to such, precisely in view of the eternal divine *consilium* regarding the "incarnation" of Word and Wisdom. In this context, one might bear in mind that the Virgin's hypostatic union with Wisdom (the Holy Spirit) is not only the result of Mary's own free intention in time, but also of the Will of God in eternity. We must also remark, for the sake of completeness, that to identify the beginning of Mary's hypostatic union with the Annunciation is by no means the only option at hand; as intimated above, texts such as *Sirach* 24 would seem to suggest the possibility that Mary had been hypostatically united with the Holy Spirit not only from the beginning of her life,⁴⁰ but even "preexistentially" in an analogical, symbolical sense to be sure.

Path: "The Holy Prophet said: 'In the heart is a light . . . , a share of the Prophetic light, and it has been bestowed in the hearts of the believers.'"

³⁸ Cf. *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 19: "Blessed is he who existed before he existed."

³⁹ This does not contradict the simultaneous teaching which holds that what is predicated of the Logos must also be predicated of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁰ The question of whether this "beginning" would refer to her conception or to her birth is beyond the scope of the present essay. We note only that in Catholic theology it is not heretical to hold that Mary was purified from sin at the "instant" of her ensoulment, which is considered the "beginning" of her life. Thus when Aquinas holds that Mary was touched by original sin *before* her

In Aquinas' *Expositio Salutationis angelicae* a 1 we read of the Virgin: "Without corruption she conceived, in solace she carried, and in joy she gave birth to the Savior" (*quia sine corruptione concepit, in solatio portavit, et in gaudio peperit salvatorem*). Compare Aquinas' triadic Marian statement with the twofold triadic proclamation in the first-century Jewish-Christian *Odes of Solomon* 19:10-11:

10. She gave birth with desire as of a mighty man,
And she brought forth openly,
And she acquired him in great grandeur.

11. And she loved him in salvation,
And watched over him in graciousness,
And presented him in splendor.⁴¹

Expositio Salutationis angelicae a 3 affirms, in accord with traditional Christian theology, the priority of Christ over the Virgin: "Thus, therefore, the Virgin is blessed; but even more blessed is the fruit of her womb." (*Sic ergo est virgo benedicta; sed et magis benedictus fructus eius*). Yet in article 1 of this same work, Aquinas

ensoulment, this is a perfectly valid theological option in current Catholic dogma. This involves the traditional belief that the embryo exists for a certain period of time before actual ensoulment. To hold that Mary was never touched by original sin is also a legitimate position for a Catholic. For the sake of completeness we should note that the concept of original sin is formally absent in Judaism, Jewish Christianity, and Islam.

⁴¹ Our translation from the Syriac; compare the James H. Charlesworth translation: "10. She brought forth like a strong man with desire, and she bore according to the manifestation, and she acquired according to the Great Power. 11. And she loved with redemption, and guarded with kindness, and declared with grandeur." It is perhaps significant that this Marian ode is presented in the name of Solomon; whereas on the one hand the title *Sedes Sapientiae* refers to Lady Wisdom's throne mentioned in *Sirach* 24, on the other hand many ecclesiastical writers associate the *Sedes Sapientiae* with the throne of Solomon; cf. Frithjof Schuon's essay "The Seat of Wisdom" in *The Fullness of God. Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*. Ed., James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2004), 137-43. One might also refer to the significance of the Solomonic character of the *Book of Wisdom*, whose 7th chapter is among the most esoteric of the Jewish scriptures dealing with Lady Wisdom.

presents several arguments which would seem to contain the esoteric seeds of a more “equivalent” Christic-Marian paradigm. Here we will translate three passages from article 1; the first passage implies that Mary was not merely a passive recipient of the divine grace, but that she actively effected, in union with the Holy Spirit, the conception of Christ. In what follows, one should bear in mind that according to traditional Catholic theology, “grace” is understood as the “divine nature” immanent in the human soul:

[B]ut the Blessed Virgin’s soul was so full [of grace] that therefrom grace overflowed into her flesh, so that she might therefrom conceive the Son of God. And therefore does Hugh of St. Victor say: “Because in her heart the love of the Holy Spirit singularly burned, on account of this, she worked miracles in her flesh, for therefrom was born God and man.”⁴²

In the second passage, there is proposed a certain equivalency between Christ and Mary in the order of salvation, and this is fitting, given that Mary cannot be, in every respect, subordinate to Christ, on account of her status as Mother, and not Spouse, of the New Adam, a position which in certain respects implies not only equality but also even an element of priority:

[B]ut if one possessed so much [grace] so as to suffice unto the salvation of all men of the world, this would be the maximum: and this is in Christ, and in the Blessed Virgin. . . . *Sirach* 24:25 says of her, “In me is all hope of life and of virtue.” She is therefore full of grace, and exceeds angels in the plenitude of grace; and on account of this is she fittingly called Mary, which being interpreted is, “The one illuminated within herself”; and so *Isaiah* 58:11, ‘With splendors shall He fill thy soul’; and the Illuminatrix in others, as

⁴² “[S]ed anima beatæ virginis ita fuit plena quod ex ea refudit gratiam in carnem, ut de ipsa conciperet filium Dei. Et ideo dicit Hugo de s. Victore: quia in corde eius amor spiritus sancti singulariter ardebat, ideo in carne eius mirabilia faciebat, intantum quod de ea nasceretur Deus et homo.”

much as even unto the entire world; and for this reason is she assimilated (compared) to the sun and moon.”⁴³

In the third, and perhaps most extraordinary passage, Aquinas establishes that both Christ and Mary are rightly called “the Lord.” The orthographic divergence between the English words “Lord” and “Lady” does not effectively convey the flavor of equivalency contained in the Latin terms *Dominus* and *Domina*; in order to better reproduce the sense of the Latin, we avoid the English word “Lady” in what follows:

Lk. 1:35, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee.” Thus, therefore, more intimate with God is the Blessed Virgin than an angel is. . . . [It] is sung of her: “Of the totality of the Trinity the noble *trinclinium*.” . . . She is mother of the Lord, and for this reason she is the Lord (*domina*). And so this name “Mary” befits her, which in the Syriac language is interpreted, “the Lord.”⁴⁴

That Mary is the *trinclinium*, or resting place, of the Trinity, recalls her title *Sedes Sapientiae*, that is, her human nature is the resting place, or throne, of the uncreated divine Lady Wisdom. Lastly, by “Syriac,” Aquinas means Aramaic; the angelic Doctor thus assimilates to the name “Mary” the ancient Christian Aramaic divine title, “Mar,” “Lord” (= Greek *ho Kyrios*) which is contained in the Jewish-Christian liturgical acclamation recorded by Paul, namely, “Maranatha!”⁴⁵

⁴³ “[S]ed quando haberet tantum quod sufficeret ad salutem omnium hominum de mundo, hoc esset maximum: et hoc est in Christo, et in beata virgine. . . . Eccli. XXIV, 25: in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis. Sic ergo plena est gratia, et excedit Angelos in plenitudine gratiae; et propter hoc convenienter vocatur Maria quae interpretatur illuminata in se; unde Isai. LVIII, 11: implebit splendoribus animam tuam; et illuminatrix in alios, quantum ad totum mundum; et ideo assimilatur soli et lunae.”

⁴⁴ “*Luc. I, 35: spiritus sanctus superveniet in te. Sic ergo familiarior cum Deo est beata virgo quam Angelus. . . . Et . . . cantatur de ea: totius Trinitatis nobile triclinium. . . . mater domini, et ideo domina est. Unde convenit ei hoc nomen Maria, quod Syra lingua interpretatur domina.*”

⁴⁵ It is possible that primitive Aramaic-speaking Christianity in Jerusalem (and

We here cite *Summa theologiae*, 1a. 25, 6 ad 4, where Aquinas ascribes to the Virgin the qualities of divine infinity, dignity, and goodness; the same attributes are assigned not only to the humanity of Christ, but also to created happiness. This triadic paradigm would seem to suggest connotatively not only an aspect of a certain non-delimitation in Christ and the Virgin in their humanity, but also in creation in general; and this is justified, from one angle, by the fact that the finite emerges from, and participates in, the divine Infinity:

The humanity of Christ, from the fact that it is united to the Godhead; and created happiness from the fact that it is the fruition of God; and the Blessed Virgin from the fact that she is the mother of God; have all a certain infinite dignity from the infinite good, which is God. And on this account there cannot be anything better than these; just as there cannot be anything better than God.⁴⁶

elsewhere) discerned an allusion to the name Mary in the Christic title *Mar*, Lord. That Mary is contained implicately in the proclamation that “Yeshua is Lord (*Mar*)” might naturally have inspired the Jewish Christians to see in the Virgin an “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit, paralleling Christ as incarnation of the Logos. This would explain the assimilation of Mary to the Holy Spirit in the ancient Aramaic *Gospel of the Hebrews*, in which Christ uses the phrase, “My Mother, the Holy Spirit.” Thus the beginnings of a “higher” Mariology might not be situated in medieval Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, but in ancient Aramaic Christianity. One could furthermore note that the primitive concept of the preexistent Lady *Ecclesia*, found already in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and 2 *Clement*, could hardly have failed to remind early Christians of the Virgin Mary, and regardless of all exegetical debates, the same can be said of *Apocalypse* 12:1’s figure of the queen of heaven. Lastly, the late 1st-century Syriac *Odes of Solomon* no. 19 presents the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit in a manner which makes it difficult to distinguish which verses apply to whom.

⁴⁶ Consider the following passage from Frithjof Schuon: “The Blessed Virgin as *Sedes Sapientiae* personifies this merciful Wisdom [of Femininity in *divinis*], which descends towards us and which we too . . . bear in our very essence. . . .” Frithjof Schuon, *The Fullness of God. Frithjof Schuon on Christianity*. Ed. by James Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2004), 143. Let us further recall the thesis of Matthias Scheeben, perhaps the greatest German Catholic theologian of the 19th century, according to which the union between Christ and believers is nothing other than a prolongation of the hypostatic union of the eternal Logos with Jesus Christ.

* * *

Aquinas' teaching on the possibility of a multiplicity of Logos incarnations is consonant with sacred scripture. In his *Sententiarum* lib. 3 d. 1 q. 2 a. 5 s. c. 2, Thomas refers to the *Book of Wisdom* in order to illustrate how the unity of a divine Person is not incompatible with the assumption of a multiplicity of human natures. *Wisdom* 7:27: "And being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh friends of God and prophets."⁴⁷ *Sirach* 50, as we have noted before, portrays Simon the high priest as a manifestation of the divine hypostasis of Wisdom on the earthly plane. One might also consider once again *Hebrews* 1:1-2: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us in a Son." God's speech is the Logos; God manifested the Logos repeatedly throughout sacred history. This scriptural passage seems to suggest indirectly that Jesus and the previous Prophets were "incarnations" or theophanies of the same Logos. These modes of manifestation of the Logos certainly involved ontological variation and differentiation, but the Prophets and Jesus were all mutual manifestations of the same divine Logos.⁴⁸ Such a "graduated" manifestation of the single Logos in multiple modalities is also suggested by *John* 1:17: "For the Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The same Word that had been revealed in the modality of Law "in times past" by the Prophet Moses, was later revealed in the modality

⁴⁷ *Sententiarum* lib. 3 d. 1 q. 2 a. 5 s. c. 2: "Praeterea, majoris bonitatis et dignitatis ostensiva est unio qua filius Dei humanam naturam in unitatem personae assumpsit, quam illa qua mentem hominis per gratiam sibi unit. Sed haec secunda unio quae est per gratiam, non est filii ad unum tantum, sed ad multos, quia sapientia in animas sanctas se transfert; Sap. 7. Cum ergo bonum sit diffusivum et communicativum, videtur quod illa unio quae est in unitate personae, possit esse in persona filii ad multas humanas naturas."

⁴⁸ One could naturally, from a Christian perspective, assert that the previous Prophets were theophanies of the Logos, whereas Christ was an incarnation of the Logos.

of grace and truth by Jesus.⁴⁹ The Prophet of Islam also conforms eminently to this Abrahamic paradigm of multiplicity of Logos theophany: “He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, for a guidance to mankind . . .” (Qur’an sura 3:3-4).

The mention of Muhammad once again “complicates” the theological paradigm from a Christian viewpoint. In order to prepare to bring this chapter to at least a provisional conclusion, perhaps it might be helpful to explore another passage from Aquinas, in which the angelic doctor specifies that the New Law, which will endure till the end of the world, is primarily an inward reality, and only secondarily outward:

ST I-II q. 106 a. 1 s. c. On the contrary, the New Law is the law of the New Testament. But the law of the New Testament is instilled in our hearts. For the Apostle, quoting the authority of *Jeremias* 31:31, 33: “Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord; and I will perfect unto the house of Israel, and unto the house of Judah, a new testament,” says, explaining what this statement is (*Hebrews* 8:8, 10): “For this is the testament which I will make to the house of Israel . . . by giving My laws into their mind, and in their heart will I write them.” Therefore the New Law is instilled in our hearts.

ST I-II q. 106 a. 1 co. I answer that, “Each thing appears to be that which preponderates in it,” as the Philosopher states (*Ethic.* ix, 8). Now that which is preponderant in the law of the New Testament, and whereon all its efficacy is based, is

⁴⁹ The source of the Christic grace and truth is twofold: Christ possesses grace and truth “derivatively” as son of Mary, who in her turn is the “incarnation” of Lady Wisdom, in whom, according to *Sirach* 24:25 (Vulgate enumeration), is “all *grace* of the way and of the *truth*.” The esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* 101 reads: “For my mother gave me [falsehood], but my true mother gave me life.” The physical mother is Eve, the true mother is spiritual, namely, the Virgin Mary as embodiment and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth; Mary thus incarnates Truth. Yet Christ, as incarnation of the Logos, possesses grace and truth directly from the eternal Word. Once more we see that an artificial schematization is to be avoided with regard to the hypostatic interplays in the order of grace.

the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ. Consequently the New Law is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Ghost, which is given to those who believe in Christ. This is manifestly stated by the Apostle who says (*Romans* 3:27): “Where is . . . thy boasting? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith”: for he calls the grace itself of faith “a law.” And still more clearly it is written (*Romans* 8:2): “The law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and of death.” Hence Augustine says (*De Spir. et Lit.* xxiv) that “as the law of deeds was written on tables of stone, so is the law of faith inscribed on the hearts of the faithful”: and elsewhere, in the same book (xxi): “What else are the Divine laws written by God Himself on our hearts, but the very presence of His Holy Spirit?” Nevertheless the New Law contains certain things that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Ghost, and pertaining to the use of that grace: such things are of secondary importance, so to speak, in the New Law; and the faithful need to be instructed concerning them, both by word and writing, both as to what they should believe and as to what they should do. Consequently we must say that the New Law is in the first place a law that is inscribed on our hearts, but that secondarily it is a written law.

In essence, the “New Law” is not to be identified with any religion considered solely on the outward plane, but with the inward presence of the divine Spirit in the hearts of the faithful. Insofar as the New Law is inward it can be associated with the supraformal primordial or archetypal Religion, that is the inward Religion (or the inward essence of Religion as such), which according to Islamic theology manifests itself throughout history on the formal plane as the various heavenly revelations. Now this thesis, that the primordial Religion, or the inward dimension of religion, has existed from the beginning of the world, does not necessarily contradict Aquinas’ assertion in *ST* I-II q. 106 a. 3 s. c.: “I answer that . . . it was not fitting for the New Law to be given from the beginning of the world”; for though the inward Law was not then “given,” this does not necessitate that it did not yet in itself exist, and its existence as such or per se would seem to

be implied by Aquinas when he continues in *ST* I-II q. 106 a. 3 ad 2: “The state of mankind does not vary according to diversity of place, but according to succession of time. Hence the New Law avails for all places, but not for all times: although at all times there have been some persons belonging to the New Testament, as stated above (1, ad 3).”

Now the question of the possibility of the Islamic revelation’s authenticity from a Thomistic perspective would seem to be precluded by his affirmation that the New Law will last till the end of the world, a topic he deals with in *ST* I-II q. 106 a. 4. On the other hand, if the New Law has existed implicately as supraformal (inward) primordial Religion from the beginning of the world, not only would it be logical that it would endure till the same world’s end, as Aquinas maintains, but this would also allow us to clarify that the New Law, as implicate primordial Religion, cannot be restrictively and exhaustively identified with the Christian religion on the outward, historical or “sociological” plane; we allude to the very real distinction between the Church as the mystical Body of Christ and the historical phenomenon of “Christianity,” the latter term never appearing once in the New Testament. This clarification would then open up the possibility that a further “renewal” of heavenly revelation after Christianity (apart from the question of the *possibility* or *fittingness* of such) would not mean that the New Law as such does not last till the end of the world; in any event, and be that as it may, Aquinas rightly maintains that the New Law will pass away only in heaven, in eternity; after all, in the beatific vision there is no longer any need for “religion,” which etymologically implies a means of “binding” or uniting humanity to God.

In *ST* I-II q. 106 a. 4 ad 2, Aquinas maintains that *John* 16:13 was fulfilled at Pentecost, so that the Paraclete’s coming can have nothing to do with the appearance or arrival of any future Prophet. That to a certain degree Pentecost fulfills the promise of the Paraclete’s coming cannot be denied; however, a careful reading of *John* 16 reveals that Christ’s promises in this regard are polyvalent and simultaneously imply multiple levels of fulfillment. Thus the promise of the Paraclete’s coming also

seems to coincide with Christ's eschatological *parousia*,⁵⁰ and the Spirit-Paraclete even coincides with Christ in some sense.⁵¹ Once more, Aquinas is correct when he writes that Christ's promise of the Paraclete to teach all truth was fulfilled in the historical mission of the twelve apostles: "Now the Holy Ghost taught the apostles all truth in respect of matters necessary for salvation; those things, to wit, that we are bound to believe and to do." This is certainly a fulfillment of Christ's promise in *John* 16; but given the polyvalent dimension of *John* chapters 14-16 it seems that there must also be an eschatological applicability to the Paraclete's teaching, and it is precisely this polyvalent opening toward the eschatological which, from an Islamic perspective, allows one to see in Muhammad the possibility of a Paracletic function, although this cannot be reconciled in any direct sense with the Thomistic perspective. Our basic line of argumentation, namely, that Christ's prophecy of the Paraclete's coming possesses multiple layers of fulfillment, including but not restricted to Pentecost, may be supported by the example of Christ's prophecy regarding the destruction of the Jerusalem temple under Vespasian in 70 CE, for this prophecy speaks of this historical event as if it were the eschatological end of the world. The most natural theological interpretation of this fact is that prophecy in general implies and encompasses multiple levels of historical fulfillment. The conclusion for our present purposes is that just as Christ's prophecy of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE also has a fulfillment at the end of the world, so Christ's prophecy of the Paraclete's coming at Pentecost can have a further and later historical fulfillment in a Paracletic Prophet such as Muhammad.⁵²

⁵⁰ See *John* 14:3, 18-19, 22; 15:26; 16:16-19. These verses presuppose a realized eschatology which "collapses" the *parousia* not only with Pentecost, but also with the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; see our essay, "The Christic and Marian Dimensions of the Good Friday Singularity Paradigm."

⁵¹ *1 John* 2:1 explicitly calls Jesus the Paraclete; *2 Corinthians* 3:17 says of Christ: "Now the Lord is the Spirit."

⁵² On the polyvalent nature of the two prophecies of Christ regarding the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Paraclete, as well as the

It will be helpful in this context to revisit our earlier point regarding the lack of a claim within Islam to being an essentially different religion apart from either Judaism or Christianity; and it is noteworthy that the Qur'anic aya (61:6) which sees in Muhammad a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy concerning the Paraclete's coming indeed emphasizes the continuity, not discontinuity, between the three variants of the Abrahamic covenant, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: "And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! I am a Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bring good tidings of a Messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One (Ahmad)."

Rather than giving out our own words, we wish to conclude by citing a few verses from sacred scriptures; once more we quote sura 5:48: "For each [nation] We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way [= religion]. Had God willed He could have made you one community. . . . Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ." And finally, we give the words of Paul, from *1 Corinthians* 4:5: "Therefore, judge not before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God."

Islamic implications of these, see Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. Tr. by Peter Townsend. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 28.

archegos

10. The Christic Aspects of Ascent and Descent

Sura 4:157-158: . . . Jesus son of Mary, God's Messenger . . .
They slew him not for certain. But God took him up unto
Himself. God was ever Mighty, Wise.

Sura 5:112-120:

112: When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Is thy
Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from
heaven? He said: Observe your duty to Allah, if ye are true
believers.

113: (They said:) We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy
our hearts and know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and
that thereof we may be witnesses.

114: Jesus, son of Mary, said: O Allah, Lord of us! Send down
for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be
a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a
sign from Thee. Give us sustenance, for Thou art the Best
of Sustainers.

115: Allah said: Lo! I send it down for you. And whoso disbe-
lieveth of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punish-
ment wherewith I have not punished any of (My) creatures.

116: And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou
say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods
beside Allah? he saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter
that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then Thou
knewest it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not
what is in Thy Mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower
of Things Hidden.

117: I spake unto them only that which Thou commandedst me, (saying): Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when Thou tookest me Thou wast the Watcher over them. Thou art Witness over all things.

118: If Thou punish them, lo! they are Thy slaves, and if Thou forgive them (lo! they are Thy slaves). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Mighty, the Wise.

119: Allah saith: This is a day in which their truthfulness profiteth the truthful, for theirs are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they are secure for ever, Allah taking pleasure in them and they in Him. That is the great triumph.

120: Unto Allah belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is therein, and He is Able to do all things.

God took up Jesus unto Himself, and this was effected through the divine attributes of Might and Wisdom. Through his celestial ascent, Jesus was confirmed to be the Perfect Man, the Universal Man, *Adam Kadmon* in Kabbalistic language, filling all the cosmos, permeating every atom of the world with his breath, as Rumi says of Jesus.¹

According to sura 5, God sent down a table to the world, a feast table of the food of heaven. This table signifies the Prophet Jesus himself. Through this heavenly food of primordial submission, of *Islam*, which effects *fana* and *unio mystica*, the heavenly Gardens underneath which rivers flow are attained by the faithful. Those who partake of the heavenly food in faithfulness to God receive the greatest reward, the “great triumph,” namely, the Gardens and rivers of Paradise. This is the opposite of the greatest punishment meted out to those who partake of the heavenly food in unfaithfulness and profanation. The divine punishment and reward in relation to this heavenly food are meted

¹ See Mir Valiuddin, *Love of God. A Sufic Approach* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Sufi Publishing Co., 1972), 73.

out by means of the same two divine attributes which effected the ascension of Jesus, namely, the divine Might and Wisdom. And what is the food of heaven but Wisdom, the *Umm al-Kitab*? Wisdom is the Mother of the Book, of the Logos (denoted by *Amr* in the *al-Qadr* sura). Jesus, the son of Wisdom, naturally participates in the divine Wisdom from which he emerges, for as divine Messenger, the Christ is a manifestation on the earthly plane of the *Kitab*, the Book as plenary “exposition” of the Word (*Amr*, *Kalima*), the Word of God which Jesus is, for Christ, son of Mary, is the Word and Spirit of God, and is so in a unique sense, as Ibn al-‘Arabi writes: “The seal of universal sancity above which there is no other saint is Jesus.”²

Sura 5:114: “for the first of us and for the last of us.” The phrase “first and last” refers at one level to the Prophets and their representatives (for instance, the Imams or caliphs);³ therefore we may see here a reference to Adam and to Muhammad, including, by extension, the eschatological *Mahdi*. Jesus prophesied the coming of *Ahmad*, and Jesus will accompany the *Mahdi* in the last days in the renewal and purification of the world. According to tradition, Jesus and Muhammad will participate in the testing of the righteous and unrighteous in Jerusalem on the Day of Judgment. The Prophets and their representatives are sustained by God through the food which is the bread of heaven, the *Umm al-Kitab*, whose earthly manifestation encompasses the Virgin Mary, and through her, Jesus, as well as Fatima in the Islamic dispensation, who shares in the Spirit both by virtue of her being a manifestation of the *Umm al-Kitab* and her status of daughter of the Prophet, who bears the name *Ahmad*, a heavenly title of the Spirit (Paraclete) promised by Christ.

Through the divine Might and Wisdom, Jesus descended to the world to nourish the world with his message, he being a divine Messenger. Through the same attributes of Might and

² Quoted in Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 84.

³ “The first” and “the last” also represent, respectively, gnosis and faith; cf. Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, 60. We recall, furthermore, on a different plane, that “the First” and “the Last” are, according to sura 57:3, Divine Names: “He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things.”

Wisdom, Jesus ascended into heaven, and was taken up unto God. Yet his ascent is inseparable from his descent to the world; for the descent of Jesus as the Table of Wisdom results in the ascent of the faithful to the heavenly Garden and flowing rivers, the great triumph.

The Garden is a symbol of the *Umm al-Kitab* and of all her earthly manifestations (Fatima, Mary, Hagar, and so on). The image of the rivers of Paradise can function as a symbol of the divine gnosis. Thus the Qur'an also speaks of Paradise flowing with rivers of wine; on one level wine represents the "intoxicating" gnosis of the *unio mystica*, which inspires those who are traditionally known as the "drunken Sufis," such as al-Hallaj, who in ecstasy proclaimed: "I am the Reality!" This intoxication of identification, of the transcendence of the veil constituted by the distinction inherent in "I and Thou," of the Beloved and Lover, is spoken of by Christ in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 108: "Whoever drinks from my mouth, he will be even as I am, and I will become he; and what is hidden will be made manifest to him" The *Umm* is the Garden, the *Kitab* is the Paradise river of gnosis.⁴ The Garden of Wisdom and the Rivers of gnosis, these together constitute the great triumph, for God is Mighty, Wise.

⁴ A reversal of the symbology is also possible, given that according to traditions, Fatima is sura 109:1-3's *al-Kawthar* (*Kausar*), the fountain of Paradise.

11. The *Fatiha* and the *Pater Noster*

Al-Fatiha, The Opening, Qur'an Sura 1

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds,
The All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate,
The King of the Day of Judgment.
Thee we worship; in Thee we seek refuge.
Show us the straight way,
The way of those whom thou hast favored,
Against whom thou art not incensed, and who go not astray.

Pater Noster

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name;
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

It is certainly noteworthy that the *Fatiha* and the *Pater Noster*, the principal Islamic and Christian daily prayers, are both sevenfold in structure. God as All-Merciful and All-Compassionate represents the plenitude of mercy and compassion, and thus God is the loving Lord of the worlds. This plenitude is reinforced by the *Fatiha's* repetition of the phrase "the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate," lest one conceive of God's nature as essentially wrathful on account of the divine title which then follows, namely, "King of the Day of Judgment." It is precisely because of the divine plenitude of grace and mercy that we

worship God by imploring his help. The divine assistance takes the form of the revelation to each soul as the straight way. The straight way, or narrow path, is shown to those favored by God. They experience no wrath and they are kept from straying from the divine path.

In Islam, the path, the way, is by emphasis Submission to God. But this path possesses both exoteric and esoteric, or dogmatic and metaphysical dimensions. Dogma stresses the divine wrath associated with the Day of Judgment; esoterism stresses the gracious and merciful nature of the Judge. Esoterism mingles the two perspectives when it acknowledges the dogmatic doctrine of hell, but simultaneously affirms the temporary and purificatory nature and function of the Fire. In the end, all will be saved and return to God, for nothing but God, especially not hell, can be eternal and imperishable in the strict sense.

The All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate God of Islam is named the heavenly Father¹ by the Prophet Jesus ('Isa). As insightful Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, have recognized, the terms "son of God" and "God the Father" were used by Jesus Christ with special divine permission, and in the Bible both these terms are metaphorical, and used as such the terms therefore present no theological incompatibility with Islam. This, however, does not imply that Islam can adopt such terms, for they are meant for a different religious cosmos, namely, the Christian religious "solar system." The terms can even be used occasionally by Islamic Sufis, but never generally adopted in Islam, for their non-use in Islam serves as a permanent corrective to imbalances, or at least dangers of recurring disequilibria, in the Church, imbalances which could never be condoned by Jesus Christ. In any event, in the final analysis, the term "Father in heaven" is a precise equivalent of the Qur'anic divine Names "All-Merciful and All-Compassionate."

"Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds" corresponds to "Our Father who art in heaven." Both refer to the transcendence of

¹ That Christ refers to God as Father does not reflect the influence of patriarchal society, for Father necessarily implies Mother, and insofar as Christ speaks of the Spirit and Wisdom, he also announces the Maternal divine.

the Divine One, the Divine Essence. In the title “Lord of the worlds,” worlds can be taken in both “spatial” and “temporal” senses. Spatial, as in the worlds called “heaven” and “earth” in the *Pater Noster*. Temporal, as in “this world and in the world to come,” a Semitic phrase used by Christ, the rabbis, and the Qur’an. The Day of Judgment, as end of the temporal history of the world, has a triadic nature: Firstly, from the point of view of realized eschatology, the Day of Judgment is Now, especially in the encounter with the Creator we experience in our daily lives and at the culmination we call death. Then secondly there is the eschatological Judgment associated with Paradise and the Fire. Thirdly there is the Judgment as *Apokatastasis* when the Fire is cooled and Paradise is in a certain sense seen as union with God rather than strictly as a reward *apart from God*.

“Hallowed be thy Name.” The Name is sanctified in the coming of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. When the will of God is done upon earth, then the kingdom comes. According to the *Gospel of Thomas* logia 3 and 113, the kingdom of God is simultaneously within and outside of the believer, that is, it is both immanent and transcendent. The *Pater Noster*’s “earth” alludes to the “human,” “immanent” dimension of God’s will and kingdom, while the prayer’s “heaven” has to do with the divine and transcendent aspect of God’s will and kingdom. “Thy will be done”; in Islam, the doing of God’s will is accomplished primarily through Submission to the divine intention. In the Church, by contrast, the will of God is accomplished not only in submission to God, but above all by the bestowal of the “daily bread” of the Eucharist, which results in the forgiveness of sins: “And forgive us our trespasses.”

That the “straight way” is one of mercy and forgiveness is reflected in the *Pater Noster*’s petition for forgiveness. Ultimately, the secret of the straight way is the *Apokatastasis*, when all of creation will be saved from wrath and never again stray from mercy. The *Pater Noster* petition “Give us this *day* our *daily* bread” corresponds to the *Fatiha* phrase “the *Day* of Judgment.” Therefore, this daily bread is both temporal and eschatological, and it is the Eucharistic Passover bread alluded to in sura 5, which bears the title “The Table Spread” (*Al-Ma’idah*), verses 112-115:

112. When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Is thy Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from heaven? He said: Observe your duty to God, if ye are true believers.

113. (They said:) We wish to eat thereof, that we may satisfy our hearts and know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and that thereof we may be witnesses.

114. Jesus, son of Mary, said: O God, Our Lord! Send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us, and a sign from Thee. Give us sustenance, for Thou art the Best of Sustainers.

115. God said: Lo! I send it down for you. And whoso believeth of you afterward, him surely will I punish with a punishment wherewith I have not punished any of (My) creatures.

This bread is associated with the divine forgiveness of sins, and so it is immediately followed in the *Pater Noster* by the petition for the forgiveness of sins. But it is not only a private, but also a communal forgiveness, dependent as it is on forgiving one's fellow human beings: "as we forgive those who trespass against us." Since this feast is associated with forgiveness of sins, the sura announces that those who desecrate the sacred bread will receive a unique divine wrath. And this wrath is precisely what the *Pater Noster's* final petition seeks to shield the believer from: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

12. The Prophetic Essence of the Virgin Mary in Qur'anic Context

Sura 19:28: "O sister of Aaron!"

Sura 66:12: "And Mary, daughter of 'Imran. . . ."

According to the Jewish scriptures, the Prophet Moses was the son of Imran. Moreover, Moses had at least two siblings, the Prophet Aaron and the Prophetess Miriam (Maryam in Arabic), or Mary. The old anti-Islamic apologetic and polemic that charged Muhammad with confusing the Hebrew Miriam with the Christian Virgin Mary is patently fallacious. If Muhammad knew the apocryphal (esoteric) stories of the Virgin Mary's family, as the same apologists readily claim, he could not have been ignorant of her parent's names, which are clearly recorded in the main text such polemicists propose as the Prophet's source, namely "Joachim" and "Anna" in the *Protevangelion of James*, a document which still possesses semi-canonical status among many Christians in the East.

The question then arises, why does the Qur'an associate the Virgin Mary so intimately with the Prophet Moses' family? A possible solution to this enigma presents itself when we examine the Qur'anic passages in question. Not only is the Virgin Mary associated with the family of Moses, she is more fundamentally associated with the *Prophethood* of Moses. Sura 2:87 mentions Jesus and Mary immediately after the words, "And verily We gave Moses the Book. . . ."; similarly sura 23:49-50 states: "And verily We gave Moses the Book, that haply they might go aright. And we made the son of Mary and his mother to be a sign, and We gave them refuge on a height, a place of rest and security and water springs."

The answer to our question now lies at hand: The Qur'an associates Mary with Moses the Prophet in order to stress that she is also a Prophet (though not in an identical sense as Moses

is), indeed, Sufis have called Mary the Mother of all Prophets. There is quite a profound metaphysical import to the alliterative Prophetic triad “Moses, Mary, Muhammad.” Moses represents divine Law; Mary represents the divine Mercy; Muhammad embodies a synthesis of the two, Law and Mercy, so that there is a spiritually logical progression from Moses and Mary to Muhammad.

Mary is, moreover, the flowering of Moses’ Torah, or “the Book” (“Scripture”), as it is denominated in the Qur’an. In Jewish scriptures, the divine attribute of Wisdom is personified concretely as Lady Wisdom (see *Proverbs* 8, *Sirach* 24, *Wisdom* 7). The same scriptures state that this Lady Wisdom, a celestial, preexistent entity, is on the earthly plane embodied in or manifested as the Mosaic Torah. After Lady Wisdom praises herself in *Sirach* 24:1-31 (= vv. 1-22 in modern versions), the inspired author explains in vv. 32-33: “All these things are the book of life, and the covenant of the Most High, and the knowledge of truth. Moses commanded a law in the precepts of justices . . .” (= v. 23 in modern versions). The *Book of Baruch* 3:38-4:1 (= 3:37-4:1 in modern versions) also identifies preexistent heavenly Wisdom (see *Baruch* 3:28-29) with the Mosaic Torah: “Afterwards she was seen upon earth, and conversed with men. This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law, that is for ever.”

The Qur’anic equivalent of the Jewish preexistent Lady Wisdom embodied on the earthly plane as the Torah, is the *Umm al-Kitab*, the celestial Mother of the Book, embodied on the earthly plane as the written Qur’an. But ultimately the earthly and heavenly Book are not two separate entities, rather there is a continuity between the two, so that the created and uncreated realities “participate” in each other. This dialectical interplay and interpenetration constitute the heavenly and earthly Book as a single sacred reality, while not canceling the uncreated and contingent differentiations; in one sense the “created” Qur’an is an emanation of the uncreated Qur’an.

On the earthly plane, the Virgin Mary is an embodiment of the celestial Lady Wisdom whom the Jewish scriptures portray as illiterate in the Mosaic Torah. Here we have the principle reason why the Qur’an so intimately links Moses and the Virgin Mary. Moses was given the Book embodying Lady Wisdom, and

the very same celestial Book, in its feminine dimensions, was manifested as the Virgin Mary in the Christian dispensation. That is to say, the same Mercy which the Qur'an represents or conveys to creation ("And what We reveal of the Qur'an is a healing and a mercy for believers," sura 17:82), is communicated to humanity through the merciful Mary, Mother of all Prophets. Mary's exaltation as announced by the choirs of angels demands an exalted Mariology: "And when the angels said: 'O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation' (sura 3:42). "Blessed art thou among women. . . . Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (*Luke* 1:42, 48). Both Mary and Jesus participate in and embody the very same divine blessing. Mary and Jesus therefore constitute a single sacred sign of divine mercy in the Qur'an, and this is reflected in Luke's version of the annunciation: "Blessed art thou, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (*Luke* 1:42). Sura 19:31 reaffirms the blessedness of Mary's son: "And (God) hath made me (Jesus) blessed, wheresoever I may be." But neither son nor mother is blessed in isolation from the other. There is either a mutual blessing or no blessing at all in the Christic-Marian paradigm, for there can be no son without the mother, and the latter presupposes the former.

According to scriptures and traditions, each of the Prophets in the triad Moses, Mary, and Muhammad, was freed from all impurity before birth. Josephus writes that Moses' birth was painless (*Antiquities* II 1:220). This is a transparent reversal of the effects of the "fall," which *Genesis* 3 states results in the pain of childbirth. The immaculate conception of Mary is affirmed by both Western and Eastern Christian theology, by the Qur'an (sura 3:36, 42), and by Islamic theology. Muslim tradition relates the purification of Muhammad via angelic intervention as an infant on the night of his birth. The All-Merciful thus made the three Prophets plenary epiphanies of the Divine Law and Mercy, in different modes to be sure. But whereas Moses and Muhammad promulgated divine laws for the people of God, Mary, who never delivered such a law, actually embodied the essence of the divine Law, the celestial Book of Wisdom. Muhammad, whom Muslims

hold to be the Seal of the Prophets,¹ cannot be understood in his essence without reference to Mary as Mother of the Prophets. Indeed, Mary is the Mother of Prophecy, and as such she is thus intimately related to the very essence of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Prophecy.

The Holy Spirit is “reflected” in richly diverse modes on varying celestial and earthly planes. On one plane, the Spirit is reflected in the choirs of “angels,” preeminently in the Archangel Gabriel. The Semitic symbolisms, by virtue of their stark concreteness of metaphorical imagery, can extend in exegetical directions that would otherwise be unacceptable within a purely Hellenistic Christian theological framework. In an analogical mode we can defend the ancient angelomorphic Jewish-Christian Christology, which identified Christ in some sense with Gabriel and Michael. The angelomorphic Christology was condemned in the West almost exclusively because the “concrete symbolic” categories of Semitic theology were by the time of the condemnations unknown to and therefore misunderstood by the leaders of the Great Church. The Qur’anic identification of both Jesus and Gabriel with the Spirit of God, which of course establishes some sort of “equivalency” between Jesus and Gabriel, accords with ancient Jewish-Christian theology, and is essentially therefore not indefensible from a Christian point of view. That Semitic thought sees the divine Spirit as feminine in nature offers no contradiction to the Spirit also being envisaged as the male Jesus or Gabriel, because both feminine and masculine categories are applicable to the divine, both being in principle metaphorical, so that the divine is simultaneously both male and female at the non-literal level, and neither male nor female in the Ineffable Divine Essence. Similarly, the Spirit is simultaneously personal and non-personal. Regarding the latter,

¹ Not a few Christian theologians accept the Prophethood of Muhammad. Currently the controversial theologian Hans Küng sees no obstacle for Catholic theology to accept Muhammad as a genuine Prophet. Earlier, the Catholic scholar Louis Massignon acknowledged in print the Prophethood of Muhammad in an even more plenary sense than Küng does, and he was never censured by the Vatican for his public views. On the contrary, Massignon was universally admired and honored in his church.

Luke 1:35, in its use of Hebrew synonymous poetic parallelism speaks of the Holy Spirit as a non-personal “power” of the divine: “The *Holy Ghost* shall come upon thee, and *the power* of the Most High shall overshadow thee. . . .”

On another celestial plane, the Spirit is manifested as Lady Wisdom. Sophia is a breath and utterance of God, which is to say she is a Spirit and Word of God. In Hebrew and Aramaic the words for spirit and breath are one and the same. Sophia is a divine Breath-Spirit: “For she is a breath of the power of God” (*Wisdom* 7:25). Sophia is an Utterance-Word of God: “I came out of the mouth of the Most High” (*Sirach* 24:5). Wisdom and Spirit are identified in *Wisdom* 1:4 and 5, the same reality being called “wisdom” in verse 4 and “Holy Spirit” in verse 5. The two are fittingly combined in verse 6 as “the Spirit of Wisdom.” *Wisdom* 9:1-2 then identifies Sophia and Logos as equivalent creative entities. We are therefore fully justified in speaking of a single sacred reality which may be denominated the divine “Wisdom-Word.” The Sophia-Logos is grammatically and metaphorically female and male respectively. On the earthly plane, one manifestation of this “pair” is the prophetic unity Mary-Jesus, which in the Qur’anic paradigm form/s a single *baraka* (blessing). An Islamic *hadith* of the Prophet Idris (Enoch) states: “Wisdom is the Spirit of Life.” In view of Enoch’s status as the source of esoteric doctrine in the Kabbalah, this “Wisdom” must not be mere proverbial wisdom, but must be the eternal Lady Wisdom, who at some point coincides with the Holy Spirit.

On the earthly plane, the Spirit is reflected in the Prophets,² whose Seal, in the Abrahamic sphere of religion/s, is Muhammad. Yet Mary as Mother of Prophecy is the very font or fount of Prophecy and she reflects the Spirit in a unique mode by virtue of the fact that she as woman analogically mirrors most fittingly the Spirit in its feminine symbology and potencies, “Spirit” in the languages of the revealed Jewish and Jewish-Christian scriptures being grammatically feminine and imaged as such in sacred scripture and liturgy. In this sense, Mary is in an eminent

² In the Christian scriptures we read that “God . . . spoke in times past to the fathers in the prophets” (*Hebrews* 1:1). *1 Peter* 1:10-11 states that the Spirit of Christ dwelt in the prophets of old.

degree a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. . ." (*Luke* 1:35). That is, Mary personifies the divine *Shekhinah* that indwelt the Temple of Solomon and the ark of the covenant. Sura 2:248: "And further their Prophet said unto them, Verily the sign of his kingdom shall be that the ark shall come unto you: therein shall be the *Sakina* (= *Shekhinah*) from your Lord, and the relics which have been left by the family of Moses, and the family of Aaron; the angels shall carry it. Verily this shall be a symbol unto you, if ye believe."

Allegorically, Mary is the *Shekhinah* of the temple and the ark of the covenant. She thus logically issues forth from the "relics" that Moses' and Aaron's family preserved in the ark. The angels who carry the ark, that is, who support Mary as Throne of Wisdom, are the Qur'anic angels of the Annunciation. These interpretative correspondences make sense from the standpoint of faith: "Verily this [ark] shall be a *symbol* unto you, if ye believe." In the visions of German Augustinian mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich, it is said that Mary embodied, or issued forth, from the same divine blessing which inhered in the relics within the ark of the covenant: "Mary . . . had been conceived of that pure Blessing which had been taken from Adam before the Fall, which through Abraham had descended until it was possessed by Joseph in Egypt, after whose death it had been deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, and thence withdrawn to be handed over to Joachim and Anne."³ The same divine blessing is traced back ultimately to Adam, from which it was removed and passed down from generation to generation through a line of holy prophets. Emmerich's doctrine of the "corporeal" transmission of the Adamic prophetic essence in this respect agrees perfectly with Jewish, but especially Islamic traditions. The blessing is corporeal in an analogical sense. Aquinas in his *Summa theologiae*, pars tertia 31.1 condemns only an overly literalistic understanding of this prophetic transmission originating from the body of Adam, not the symbolism in itself. There are two further verses in the Qur'an which refer to the divine *Shekhinah*. Sura 9:26: "After-

³ Anne Catherine Emmerich, *Life of Christ and Biblical Revelations* Vol. 1 (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books, 1986), 369.

wards God sent down his *Sakina* upon his apostle and upon the faithful, and sent down troops of angels which ye saw not; and he punished those who disbelieved; and this was the reward of the unbelievers. Nevertheless God will hereafter be turned unto whom he pleaseth; for God is gracious and merciful." Sura 9:40: "Be not grieved, for God is with us. And God sent down his *Sakina* upon him, and strengthened him with armies of angels, whom ye saw not. And he made the word of those who believed not to be abased, and the word of God was exalted; for God is mighty and wise."

According to St. Cyril: "It is written in the *Gospel to the Hebrews* that when Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father called a mighty power in the heavens which was called Michael, and committed Christ to the care thereof. And the power came down into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months. Afterwards she gave birth to him, and he increased in stature, and he chose the apostles, was crucified and taken up by the Father." The point of this plastic and fluid theological symbolism is that the Holy Spirit is reflected in varying modes on the celestial and earthly planes. In the ancient *Epistle of the Apostles*, roughly contemporary with the *Gospel of John*, we read in chapters 13 and 14 that Jesus was "equivalent" to the Archangel Gabriel who announced his own conception to Mary:

Now that which he revealed unto us is this, which he spake: It came to pass when I was about to come hither from the Father of all things, and passed through the heavens, then did I put on the wisdom of the Father, and I put on the power of his might. I was in heaven, and I passed by the archangels and the angels in their likeness, like as if I were one of them, among the princedoms and powers. I passed through them because I possessed the wisdom of him that had sent me. Now the chief captain of the angels, is Michael, and Gabriel and Uriel and Raphael followed me unto the fifth heaven, for they thought in their heart that I was one of them; such power was given me of my Father. And on that day did I adorn the archangels with a wonderful voice, so that they should go unto the altar of the Father and serve and fulfill

the ministry until I should return unto him. And so wrought I the likeness by my wisdom; for I became all things in all, that I might praise the dispensation of the Father and fulfill the glory of him that sent me and return unto him. For ye know that the angel Gabriel brought the message unto Mary. And we answered: Yea, Lord. He answered and said unto us: Remember ye not, then, that I said unto you a little while ago: I became an angel among the angels, and I became all things in all? We said unto him: Yea, Lord. Then answered he and said unto us: On that day whereon I took the form of the angel Gabriel, I appeared unto Mary and spake with her. Her heart accepted me, and she believed, and I formed myself and entered into her body. I became flesh, for I alone was an angel (= messenger) unto myself in that which concerned Mary in the appearance of the shape of an angel. For so was I wont to do. Thereafter did I return to my Father.

Again, the fluid symbolism ultimately serves to emphasize that the divine Logos, Sophia, and Spirit cannot be bound and limited to any one particular manifestation or Prophetic epiphany. The fact that the *Epistle of the Apostles* is an ancient anti-Gnostic treatise demonstrates that the primitive angelomorphic Christology is not of Gnostic origin, but of Jewish-Christian, or what amounts to the same, of Apostolic origin. In this respect, as in others (though not in all respects of course), some of the Gnostics were heirs to the Jewish-Christian Apostolic kerygma.

The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary because she is, by virtue of her being Lady Wisdom on the earthly plane, a plenary manifestation of the Spirit. Not only is Mary indwelt by the Spirit as was the Temple, but sura 3:37 implies allegorically that Mary is inseparable from the innermost sacred mystery of the Temple. The Qur'anic text here specifies that Mary dwelt in the sanctuary, that is, in the Holy of Holies. This agrees with the tradition recorded in the *Protevangelion of James* 8:1 and 13:2, according to which she is fed from the hand of an angel: "And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as a dove⁴ that is nurtured: and she received

⁴ Note the correspondence of Mary as dove with the dove as a traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is the celestial Mother in Eastern and Semitic

food from the hand of an angel.” “Why hast thou humbled thy soul, thou that wast nourished up in the Holy of Holies and didst receive food at the hand of an angel?” Compare Qur’an 3:37: “Whenever Zechariah went into the sanctuary where she was, he found that she had food. He said: ‘O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)? She answered: ‘It is from God. God giveth without stint to whom He will.’”

Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and that but once a year, to utter the Divine Name and to beg forgiveness for humanity’s sins. The sacred symbolism of Mary’s constant abiding in the Holy of Holies implies that Mary is inseparable from the sacred mysteries which constitute the Holy of Holies. Her access thereto is plenary; males have far less a right of entrance granted to them. Mary is the High Priest, otherwise she could not visit, much less perpetually abide in, the Holy of Holies. Indeed, Mary is an embodiment of the Spirit which is the very essence and holiness of the innermost sanctuary. Leaders of the Catholic Church in modern times banned the traditional symbolism made venerable by the Fathers of the Church of Mary as the Priest of Priests, which ultimately can only refer to Mary as the High Priest. Islamic authorities similarly often claim that no woman was ever a Prophet; but then why is Mary’s biography recited in sura 21, which bears the title, “The Prophets”? Mary is Prophet in the sense that she is the Mother of Prophecy, the full font or fount of prophecy, and as a consequence Mother of the Prophets, including of Muhammad as Seal of the Prophets, who as a Mercy to all the worlds is preeminently a spiritual son of Mary the Mother of Mercy.⁵

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* states: “And it came to pass when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said unto him: My son, in all prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, thou art my first begotten son, that reignest for ever.” As we have quoted

Christian theologies.

⁵ This is to say that Mary is the very source of the spiritual Mercy of which Muhammad is a channel to the worlds. See Qur’an sura 21:107: “We have not sent thee, O Muhammad, but as a Mercy unto all the worlds.”

previously, the same ancient gospel records Christ referring to "My Mother the Holy Spirit." The synoptic tradition that has Jesus distancing himself from his mother Mary is but a reflection of the fact that more important than Mary's status as physical mother of the Messiah is her status as earthly manifestation of the celestial Lady Wisdom, or in metaphysically equivalent language, the Holy Spirit in Marian mode. Therefore the *Gospel of Thomas* 101 balances the negative stance of Jesus with a corresponding positive proclamation, the penultimate statement being unfortunately missing from the sole surviving Coptic manuscript: "Jesus said this: 'Whoever hates not his father and mother the way I do cannot be my disciple. But whoever loves not his father and mother the way I do cannot be my disciple. For my mother [...], but my true Mother gave me Life.'" Mary, as earthly manifestation of Lady Wisdom cannot fail but to impart simultaneously to her son both earthly and celestial life. In the Latin versions of *Sirach* 24, Wisdom says of herself: "I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is the grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue" (Latin version vv. 24-25). This Sophianic constellation finds its parallel in the "Logos" statement: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (*John* 14:6). Sophia is a "plenary" possessor and distributor of divine Life: "*in me is all hope of life.*" The fact that the *Sirach* "absolute" statement is attributed to Mary in the church's liturgy shows that although Christ claims to be the absolute truth and life, "*the truth, the life,*" the absoluteness in question must apply to the divine source of life and truth rather than to its manifestations in Mary and Jesus as historical personages. Otherwise one would be forced to choose between the *Sirach* and the *John* statements, to label one true and the other false. The two verses must therefore embody "relatively absolute" propositions. In the Christic sphere, the Logos is identified with the absolute Truth and Life. In the Marian sphere, the Virgin Sophia is identified with the absolute Truth and Life. The situation is partly explained by the fact that on the earthly plane a "plenary" manifestation of the divine is possible in a certain sense, but given the ontological limitations of all manifestations—including divine manifestations—in the realm of contingency, no such manifestation can be definitive in the

sense of being exhaustive. Regarding the distinctions between the created humanity of Jesus and the uncreated Word, we observe that the *Sirach* and *John* verses both refer to a reality that is absolute with regard to plenary divine manifestation of the celestial, but conversely also to a manifestation that is relative with regard to the impossibility of definitive, exhaustive ontological manifestation of the divine on the earthly plane. The latter relativity is what makes possible the apparent contradiction of exclusive claims in the two verses under consideration. The source is plenary, but the manifestation, being on the earthly plane, is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. If one wishes to retain the language of exclusiveness, one could perhaps validly speak in this context of an inclusive or shared exclusivity, or even of a diverse or diversified exclusivity. A polymorphous manifestation of plenary exclusivity would also be a possible expressive alternative. In any event, when the subject is related to ontology and the divine, one immediately encounters the many limitations at the dialectical horizons of human thought and language.

13. Mary as Prophet and “Philosopher”

Qur'an Sura 3

45. O Mary, verily God sendeth thee good tidings,
that thou shalt bear the Word, proceeding from himself;
his name shall be Christ Jesus the son of Mary,
honourable in this world and in the world to come,
and one of those who approach near to the presence of God.
47. She answered, Lord, how shall I have a son, since a man
hath not touched me? The angel said, So God createth that
which he pleaseth: when he decreeth a thing, he only saith
unto it, Be, and it is.

Qur'an Sura 19

16. Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she with-
drew from her family to a place in the East.
17. She took a curtain (of the Temple) from them; then
We sent her our Spirit, and he appeared before her as a
Perfected Man.
18. She said: “I seek refuge from thee to (God) Most Gra-
cious: (come not near) if thou dost fear God.”
19. He said: “Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to
announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.”
20. She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has
touched me, and I am not unchaste?”
21. He said: “So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, that is easy for
Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and
a Mercy from Us: It is a matter (so) decreed.”
22. So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a
remote place.

“O Mary, verily God sendeth thee good tidings.” The good news is “that thou shalt bear the Word, proceeding from himself [from God].” The question of whether to use an associative indefinite article, “*a* Word proceeding from God,” or to use the definite article in a relatively identitative sense, “*the* Word proceeding from God,” is in some respects a minor question. Both interpretations are allowed in Islamic theology, with certain qualifications. No less an authority than Ibn ‘Abbas held that “Jesus is the Word of God.” Furthermore, the standard title for Jesus with which he is addressed in the Islamic Jesus *ahadith* is “O Jesus, Word and Spirit of God.” The qualification involves the truth, as Thomas Aquinas observed, that no human nature, including that of Jesus, can be identified with the uncreated Word as such, otherwise the divine would be limited and circumscribed by the created.

What is the procession of the Word from God referred to in sura 3:45? *The Gospel of John* 15:26 speaks of a secret procession in the context of the Last Supper discourse, the same discourse wherein Christ promises the coming of the prophetic Paraclete: “But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I shall send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, she shall give testimony of me.”¹ The Word proceeds from God: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world:

¹ See Qur'an sura 61:6: “And when Jesus the son of Mary said, O children of Israel, verily I am the apostle of God sent unto you, confirming the law which was delivered before me, and bringing good tidings of an apostle who shall come after me, and whose name shall be The Glorified One.” The essential paradigm established in this verse is that the Prophet Jesus' message is not incongruous with either the past (Jewish) or future (Islamic) realities and manifestations of salvation history. Muhammad preached the reality of the one true God, and God is Spirit and Truth; Muhammad was anointed with the Spirit Paraclete to proclaim the perennial divine Message. This understanding would accord well with those Islamic exegetes who see the promised Ahmad as the spiritual or heavenly aspect of Muhammad, and not strictly as the “historical” Muhammad alone. That is to say, Ahmad is from one angle of theological vision the divine Spirit bestowed upon Muhammad constituting him an apostle of God.

again I leave the world, and I go to the Father" (John 16:28).² The Qur'anic procession of the Word certainly involves the procession of God's creative Word, 'Be!' (Kun!; fiat!). Yet God does not act "in time," and the divine attributes are assuredly eternal, uncreated, though they are revealed to and in the world which exists in temporality. The procession of the Word in time, to Mary via Gabriel the Perfect Man, is metaphysically inseparable from the eternal, atemporal "procession." If the Logos is preexistent, and this Logos is manifested as the Prophet Jesus, then so is the same preexistent divine reality manifested on the earthly plane as Mary, foreshadowed under the figure of Lady Wisdom. This is to say that the same divine reality encompasses both the attributes of Word and Wisdom, so that the two are functionally synonymous in certain domains. Insofar as the two are divine attributes, they refer ultimately to, or originate from, Being Itself, Ipsum Esse, though there can never be any question of an identity of the divine hypostases (or "emanations" as Islamic philosophy might prefer to call them) with the divine Essence as such.

Plotinus in his *Fifth Ennead* VIII. 4 understands Sophia, primordial Wisdom, as the essence of Being in relation to cosmic emanation ("assessor to the divine Intellect as projected into manifestation"). Again, Wisdom is the Intellectual Principle, which in turn is Real Being, or Authentic Being. Primal Wisdom is not "added to the Being, but is its very essence." Wisdom "embraces all the real Beings, and has made all, and all follow it, and yet it is itself those beings, which sprang into being with it, so that all is one, and the essence There is wisdom." Plotinus reinforces this role of Wisdom in cosmic emanation in *Fifth Ennead* VIII. 5: "everywhere a wisdom presides at a making."

² Thus John 15:26 and 16:28 narrate the procession of both the Word and the Spirit from God. Similarly the Qur'an speaks of the procession not only of the Word (sura 3:34), but also of the Spirit: "Verily Christ Jesus the Son of Mary is the apostle of God, and his Word, which he conveyed unto Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from himself" (sura 4:171). Here the Word and Spirit are basically equivalent terms standing for the same sacred reality. The Qur'an is thus aligned with the early Jewish-Christian pneumatic Christology, as found, for instance, throughout the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

Moreover, “the Intellectual Principle engendered . . . Wisdom . . . from itself . . ., [therefore] it is itself Wisdom.” Wisdom is *Esse* (not *Beyond-Being* of course): “The true Wisdom is Real Being. . . . and Being is Real in virtue of its origin in Wisdom.” These insights are by no means weakened, only differentiated, by the statement that then follows in section 6 that “this Wisdom [does] not itself contain . . . the causes by which Being exists,” for Wisdom nevertheless “imparts [the causes] to the entities produced in Being’s realm.” The “sub-ordinate” distinction between Authentic Being (*Ipsum Esse*) and Sophia agrees with the distinction between the Ineffable Deity and the Divine as creator or cosmic emanator and revealer. Some would designate this pair as the *Beyond-Being* and *Being*. Consider, for example, Iamblichus and St. Dionysius; regarding Iamblichus’ distinction between *Being* and *Beyond-Being*, this does not necessarily constitute a doctrine of “two powers,” and his *Beyond-Being* concept is not necessarily a contradiction of the Plotinian system, but would appear to be a “refinement” of the same outlook. It is ultimately related to Plotinus’ distinction between Authentic Being and Sophia, which is none other than Authentic Being in the mode of cosmic emanator. Plotinus himself speaks of the All-Transcending which is *Beyond-Being*, so that Iamblichus’ refinement, problematic as it might be, possesses a certain kind of legitimacy and predictability within the post-Plotinian Neoplatonic tradition. In the West, the distinction in question could be referred to as the Immanent Deity and the Economic Deity, the latter being God as revealed in the economy of salvation. What is at question here is human intellection pondering the same unitary divine Mystery from different sacred viewpoints. In the Hindu theologies, one would speak of the Transpersonal Brahman and the Personal Brahman, or *Nirguna-Brahman* (God without attributes) and *Saguna-Brahman* (God with attributes), a single Brahman considered under differing viewpoints, one intrinsic and Absolute and Simplex (Divine as Ineffable, the God of the Philosophers) and one extrinsic and Absolute in a relative mode on account of the diversity of divine attributes (Divine as creator, emanator, equivalent to Hindu *Ishvarah*, i.e., Lord, agreeing with the Abrahamic God of scriptural revelations). Eastern Christian thought again speaks of the divine Essence

and the divine energies, but the two are merged synthetically in the West in the unitive *Ipsum Esse*. Ultimately one could conceivably reconcile the Eastern Beyond-Being with the Western *Ipsum Esse*, given that both terms are considered by the respective parties as the most fundamental way of speaking of God by use of the symbol "Being." We say "symbol" here because every word in human language, including "Being," is ultimately symbolic and even metaphorical in the wider cognitive and semantic domains.

These questions are fraught with difficulties, but they may be conducive to attempts at reconciling, to the degrees possible, the differing interpretations of the unitary Divine Essence in the three Abrahamic religious variants. Islam can allow distinctions in Divinity only at the level of Being, not Beyond-Being. The latter is Absolute and Unitary in all respects, beyond all number, whether One or Three. The former, Being, is the level where number becomes applicable to God, for it is on this plane that relativity and diversity can be associated with the Divine, specifically in relation to the cosmos. At the theological level, Hinduism is as strict as Islam in denying any distinctions in the Divine Essence. Distinctions can occur only at the level of emanation (or creation). Hinduism's virtual infinity of "gods," like Judaism's multitude of angels, in no way affects the Unitary nature of Brahman. As the Upanishads repeatedly stress, "Brahman is One without a second."

The Qur'anic Mary and Jesus are inseparably linked and constitute a single sacred reality. The Prophet Jesus is ever and always "Jesus the son of Mary." This unity is reflected in the fact that Lady Wisdom on the celestial and earthly planes is viewed in the Church as both the man Jesus and the woman Mary. Here of course we are in the realm of sacred mysteries, of interplays between the created and the uncreated. To a degree a part of the solution must lie in a synthesis of the orthodox Islamic doctrine of the uncreated Word of God and the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the created Word of God. The uncreated Word appears under the veils of created words. This appearance is both limitative and expansive, and simultaneously and necessarily so. The eternal Word is limited by the event of entrance into the realm of contingency, yet human, created words are "blessed" by the divine *tanzil* (descent) of the uncreated Word. This descent imparts to

human cognition and language a potentially infinite capacity to reflect upon and explicate sacred truths definitively, infallibly, though never exhaustively so, given that human relativity and finitude are never destroyed by the effects of the gifts imparted by means of the divine *tanzil*. The transontological³ nature of the human mind, constituted thus by virtue of humanity being the *imago Dei*,⁴ ensures that the intellect is capable of contemplating and effectively and adequately interpreting sacred truths in a saving, authoritative manner.

Mary is, as manifestation of Sophia on the earthly plane, both Prophet and “philosopher.” She is the latter as recipient of the divine Word (Logos; cf. the cognate word ‘logic’) proceeding from the Eternal. Her response to the angel Gabriel as recorded in the Qur’an is intellectually reflective in a transparently “challenging” mode: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?” Or as Luke transmits the same question: “How shall this be done, because I know not man?” Mary is first “confrontational,” though her posture presupposes a willing submission to a faith statement that can be demonstrated to rest upon “reasonable,” or better, “intellective” grounds; submission implies a holy confrontation.

³ By “transontological” we refer to both Meister Eckhart’s teaching on the mind as uncreated, ‘increate’, and Proclus’ doctrine on the supraontological status of the gods (especially as they stand in relation to God) as explicated in his *Elements of Theology*. From this angle, the biblical statement “I have said ye are gods” would have reference to the human as manifestation of intellectual powers. In relation to Proclus’ teaching on the relationship of the One to the Many, or of God to the gods, the following observations of Plotinus, *Fifth Ennead* VIII. 9, would not be out of place: “He who is the one God and all the gods, where each is all, blending into a unity, distinct in powers but all one God in virtue of that one divine power of many facets. More truly, this is the one God who is all the gods; for, in the coming to be of all those, this, the one, has suffered no diminishing.” To this we could add *Bhagavadgita* 11:15: “In thy body, oh God, I beheld all the gods.” Metaphysically viewed, the Prophet Muhammad also taught that all the gods are the one God. Qur’an sura 38:5 (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem version): “How can he claim that all the gods are but one God?”

⁴ We are not hereby identifying the mind with the *imago Dei* in a restrictive sense, for the latter is reflected by and in the human totality, encompassing the body as well as mind or spirit.

It is only after intellectual grounds are presented to her from the angelic message of Gabriel, the Perfect Man, that Mary accepts the validity and truthfulness of the angelic pronouncement. *Islam*, as primordial submission, similarly implies a submission of truth claims to the criteria of reason and intellection. There is an interplay between the submission of the intellect and the submission of faith, as Luke records Mary's response: "Be it done to me according to thy word." The same is enunciated in Qur'an sura 66:12: "And Mary, daughter of 'Imran, whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His Scriptures, and was of the obedient."

Faith must therefore be grounded in the intellect, and the latter constitutes a sure foundation in light of the fact that the human mind participates in the eternal Spirit which is its ultimate source and matrix. The uncreated and creating Word and the "created" divine Word meet in Mary as the earthly manifestation and theophany of Lady Wisdom. That both Christ and Mary manifest the same preexistent Reality of Word-Wisdom⁵ also has the consequence that both, and not Christ alone, are universal signs of the divine Mercy. It is a given that Jesus is a sign of divine mercy, as sura 19:21 articulates: "He said: 'So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him [Jesus] as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us: It is a matter (so) decreed.'" But in the final analysis, Jesus and Mary constitute a single sacred sign, not two separate signs, as implied by sura 21:91: "And remember her [Mary] who preserved her virginity, and into whom we breathed of our Spirit; ordaining her and her son for a sign unto all the worlds." Similarly sura 23:50 announces in majestic diction: "And we appointed the son of Mary, and his mother, for a sign: and we prepared an abode for

⁵ One should bear in mind that in Arabic both the words "word" and "wisdom," *kalima* and *hikma*, are grammatically feminine. Aramaic *millah*, "word," is also feminine. Thus one could refer not only to Lady Wisdom, but in a sense also to "Lady Word." *The Book of Wisdom* 9:1-2 uses masculine Logos and feminine Sophia as equivalent synonyms. This brings us back full circle to the Qur'anic theological inseparability of Jesus and Mary, who together form a single sacred "sign of God," or "*ayatollah*."

them in an elevated part of the earth, being a place of quiet and security, and watered with running springs.”⁶ Such a universal signification surely implies and is predicated upon the presence of a plenitude of Mercy within the divine sign named Mary and Jesus son of Mary. Muhammad is a Mercy unto all creation; Mary and Jesus are a sign unto all creation (sura 21:91, 107).

⁶ In sura 23:50 we suspect the presence of an allusion (direct or indirect is not vital for the present context) to the ascension of Christ and the assumption of Mary. The “elevated part of the earth” would be Paradise, a peaceful region filled with living waters. The imagery accords with ancient Jewish representations of the primordial and eschatological Paradise. Running waters, moreover, constitute the central Qur’anic symbol of Paradise. From the Qur’anic perspective, the entrance of Christ into Paradise is a deathless ascent: “Yet they slew him not, neither crucified him. . . . They did not really kill him: but God took him up unto himself: and God is mighty and wise” (sura 4:157-58). This reflects, more or less, the Johannine conception of Jesus’ crucifixion as his ascent to God. Whether or not from an Islamic perspective a Marian assumption would also involve a deathless *transitio* is an intriguing question, which remains unsolved even in current Catholic theology. Leaving aside the question of probabilities, it is at least possible that an Islamic exegetical model could allow a deathless Marian assumption, especially given the fact that Fatima is held in several respects, devotionally and theologically, as equivalent to the Virgin Mary, and in some eccentric Shi’ite gnostic texts a docetic death is at times associated with Fatima. Finally, some eccentric Shi’ite traditions simultaneously hold variously that Fatima experienced a deathless transition to Paradise and that she died a natural death.

14. Silence and Night

In the lives of the saints we often encounter what is known as the “gift of tears.” The essence of weeping is the pain of loss, and the greatest loss on the “earthly” plane is that of Eden. The gnostic weeps in the night of the revelation of the Word, the Night of Majesty, of *al-Qadr. Nox revelationis manus Fatimae est*. The Night of Revelation is the Hand of Fatima, for the Night corresponds to Fatima, and the Hand connotes revelation. *Fatima manus Dei est*; Fatima is the Hand of God, the Revelation of God. The Night is the divine Silence, concealment of the Voice, for the tears of night are silent. The gnostic’s tears are not of the *vox*, but of the *nox*, indeed, they are of the eyes of Night. Being the eyes, the silence of tears refers to the Light of Revelation, of insight, and therefore of gnosis.

As Fatima is a manifestation of the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Mother of the Book, on the earthly plane, so the Virgin Mary is the earthly manifestation of the Silence of the *Umm al-Kitab*. Fatima is the Night; Mary is the matrix of Silence constituting the Night, a mystery contained in the Qur’anic account of Mary’s fast of silence.

The Garden of Eden symbolizes Fatima and Mary, indeed, all earthly theophanies of the *Umm al-Kitab*. The Garden of Eden therefore refers to the *Umm al-Kitab*’s principle of manifestation. The loss of Eden consequently is the eclipse of the *vox noctis*, the voice of the night, the revelation of the *Kitab*, or the revelation which is the *Kitab*. Indeed, the *Umm al-Kitab* “unites” the “opposites” of Silence and Word (of *Nox* and *Vox*). The *Umm*, the Mother, is the formless, unspoken archetype of the *Kitab*, whereas the *Kitab* is the “form” of the Mother. *Kitab*, Book, denotes plenary manifestation of *Umm*, Mother, for a book is a complete explication of a topic, in this context, of the Mother. *Umm* is matrix of the revealed *Kitab*. *Umm* is the One, *Kitab* is the Multiple. Each contains the principle of the other. The *Umm*

cannot but manifest herself on the celestial and earthly planes, and the *Kitab* cannot but contain within himself the principle of the unitive matrix. *Kitab* is the manifestation of the *Umm*.

In the Islamic dispensation, heaven, earth, and the Garden of Eden may refer allegorically to Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima. The Christian equivalency would be: Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary. Both Jesus and John possess an essential Marian dimension. John was conceived in the wake of his father Zachariah's prayer, which was prompted by his discovery of the Virgin Mary being fed by the hands of angels. John's conception is thus inextricably linked to the "angelic" dimension of the Virgin.

Muhammad and 'Ali (like John the Baptist and Jesus) represent the exoteric and esoteric aspects of the *Umm al-Kitab*, while Fatima constitutes the *Umm*, which is in fact the very reality of esoterism itself, as concealment and divine Silence. In this sense, the matrix, though one, is simultaneously the whole by implicate "configuration" in proleptic mode, or by her innate principle of tendency towards manifestation, an "overflowing" towards the diverse Names of God—suggesting that *Kitab* is a divine Name—which constitutes the cosmos as theophanic unveiling of the Divine Reality.

The principle of the Mother towards manifestation is the *Lux Dei*, and therefore the *Kitab* aspect of the *Umm* is alluded to in the sacred verse: "Let there be light" (*Genesis* 1:3); not that the divine Light is created, but that it issues forth into the contingent realm, the cosmic plane of entification. The uncreated Light is manifested in the creation; the created light is but the emanation of the uncreated Light. It is in this sense that we can say that the human intellect is but a refraction, or reflection, of the divine Intellect. Wisdom as Light is explicated as follows in *Wisdom* 7:26: "For she is the brightness of the eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness." *Candor est enim lucis æternæ, et speculum sine macula Dei majestatis, et imago bonitatis illius*. Wisdom as the plenary reflection of the majesty of God in this verse ties the statement to the *al-Qadr* sura, which speaks of the descent of the Word on the Night of Majesty. *Sirach* 24:6: "I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth." *Ego feci in cælis ut oriretur lumen indeficiens, et sicut*

nebula texi omnem terram. The *Sirach* verse pertains to both the solar and lunar dimensions of Wisdom by speaking of her light (solar) and her cloud of concealment (lunar).

"The night is peace until the dawn breaks" (sura *al-Qadr*). The Mother is Silence until the light of the *Kitab* dawns. The silent Word issues forth into the spoken words of revelation. Unspoken tears yearn for the return to the originative matrix of divine Silence. The night is thus the eclipse of the voice, *Nox Vocis*, which is, however, a speaking silence, *Vox Noctis*: *Umm al-Kitab Mater Vocis est.* According to the *Book of Wisdom* 1:7, the universal divine Spirit has knowledge of the Voice: "For the Spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world: and that, which containeth all things, hath knowledge of the voice." *Quoniam spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum, et hoc quod continet omnia, scientiam habet vocis.*

Mother of the Book, Silence of the Voice, and Voice of Silence; every archetype must necessarily manifest itself in the realm of forms, and every form contains in itself the principle of its archetype, which is to say that every form is but the "formal" mode of an archetype.

The *Umm al-Kitab* is mirrored in the Christian phrase: "In the beginning was the Word." *In principio erat Verbum.* In the "Principle" was the Word—in the archetype was the manifestation of the archetype, or the ex-principiation of the in-principiation. The Jewish targum renders *Genesis* 1:1's phrase, "In the beginning" as "In Wisdom," which brings us full circle to the *Umm al-Kitab* as the equivalent of the Jewish scriptures' personified preexistent Lady Wisdom (*Proverbs* 8; *Sirach* 24; *Wisdom* 7), through whom God effects creation. The holy Qur'an equivalently states: "We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with Truth" (15:85). The Truth (Reality) "coincides" with the *Umm al-Kitab*, with celestial Wisdom. *Sirach* 24:25 therefore identifies Lady Wisdom with the plenitude of Truth: "In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue."¹ *In me gratia omnis viæ et*

¹ That this verse might be absent from the original Hebrew *Sirach* text does not speak against its doctrinal, let alone, spiritual authenticity and authority; in any event the Hebrew original of *Sirach* 24 has not been recovered. The Latin

veritatis: in me omnis spes vitæ et virtutis. By virtue of the Logos' "derivation" from Wisdom (as son from mother), Christ in his "celestiality" can say: "I am the Truth." As Truth derives from Wisdom, we have in the Christic declaration of being the Truth no "usurpation" of the divine Principle in Itself. This is further clarified by the fact that Christ, when he proclaimed himself the Truth, prefaced this by saying "I am the Way." A way is not a principle in itself, but is the means and *via* to the principle. Christ as Prophet is the Way to God, but in another sense to the Sacred Father, the Tenth Intelligence, the Active Intelligence, the Holy Spirit. Once again, the Holy Spirit "coincides" with the *Umm al-Kitab*, as Christ referred to "My Mother the Holy Spirit." The way to the Sacred Father—the Truth—is constituted in the mode of life: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He is the Way to the Sacred Father; Christ is the earthly manifestation of the Sacred Father, on one level in the sense of the Active Intelligence, which coincides with the Holy Spirit as *Umm al-Kitab*, who is Christ's Mother. Christ is the Life because to know is to be, to live, to be living. Thus Christ spoke of the "living Father,"

"additions" to *Sirach* 24, if they in fact are interpolations, constitute sacred pronouncements hallowed by tradition and might be spiritually akin in certain ways to the inspired alterations made by the Greek Septuagint translators to the Hebrew texts of the Jewish scriptures. More precisely, such Latin "additions" might represent a Christian prolongation of ancient Jewish targumic practices designed to amplify and explicate an original text. The origins of these *Sirach* verses are as it were shrouded in supernal mystery and silence, and can be viewed as esoteric realities emanating from a Sophianic matrix. What may be said with certainty is that the lines in question formed a part of the pre-Vulgate Old Latin version, and thus are ancient, and not merely medieval in origin. Except for the statement, "In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue," the surrounding verses in question are present in the expanded Greek translation (GII) of *Sirach*. As for the verse just quoted, the critical *Anchor Bible*, in its volume on *Sirach* claims only the following: "At least in its final form this would seem to have been shaped in Latin for alliterative effects"; see Patrick Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira. The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 330. This sheer guess, and we are certainly justified in calling it such, is purely subjective, and moreover, ignores the profoundly doctrinal and Sophianic character of the pronouncement. Poetic concerns in prophecy, whether canonical, deuterocanonical, or liturgical, are always of secondary and indirect concern in the domain of the sacred.

for the Sacred Father is Consciousness Itself. We could rephrase the sacred saying of Christ: "I am the Way to the Father who is Living Consciousness." "I am come that you might have life in all its fullness" (*John* 10:10). This means on one level: "I am come to reveal to you the way to the Living Universal Intellect in all Its fullness." "I and the Father are one" (*John* 10:30). Christ and the *Nous* are one, just as the divine Light is the *Nur Muhammadi*.

Thus we arrive at the Sacred Mother (*Umm al-Kitab*) and the Sacred Father (*Kitab, Nous*); the *Kitab* is refracted (in partial mode) or reflected (in existentially, contingent plenary mode) through the various cosmic realms, ten specifically, in accord with traditional Islamic philosophy and the Kabbalistic tenfold sefirotic system. The ten Intelligences, which ultimately are One, are/is the Sacred Father. "I and the Father are one," for Christ is the Son (*Kitab*) of the Mother (*Umm*).

In the Islamic dispensation, the Holy Spirit is traditionally identified with the Archangel Gabriel. But Islamic tradition is multifaceted on this issue, for it has been recognized by various authorities that the *al-Qadr* sura differentiates the Spirit from the angels, and gives the Spirit precedence over the angels. Additionally, Jesus is traditionally addressed in Islamic *ahadith* thusly: "Oh Spirit and Word of God." It is transparent that the *Ruh* cannot be exhaustively identified with either Gabriel or Jesus, which is the equivalent of saying that both Gabriel and Jesus are varying manifestations of the *Ruh*. (St. Paul identifies Jesus as the Spirit in *2 Corinthians* 3:17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit"). Jewish and Jewish-Christian (Ebionite) traditions emphasize the feminine theophanies of the Spirit in Sarah, the Virgin Mary, and the personified preexistent *Ecclesia*. The Spirit is therefore not limited to masculine modes of entification. That also in Islamic thought the Spirit can possess feminine manifestations is connoted first by the non-exhaustive identification of the Spirit with Gabriel, for Jesus is also the Spirit; moreover the mystery of the Spirit Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary intimates the "openness" of the Spirit to feminine modalities. This is to say that the Spirit Gabriel approaches the Virgin Mary because of an essential "spiritual" affinity, or proximity of shared "being" between Gabriel and Mary. This is indicative of the celestial, "angelic" nature of Mary, and the "feminine" dimension

of Gabriel, which is integrated with the masculine reality, preserving and complementing rather than destroying the latter. The *Ruh*, as a non-physical reality, is in Itself neither male nor female, yet metaphorically and symbolically It possesses both masculine and feminine modes of expression.

In the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary represents the *Umm*, and Gabriel represents the *Kitab* in theophanic mode of manifestation. Here Gabriel, as celestial manifestation of the *Kitab* on earth, foreshadows the earthly appearance of the *Kitab* in Christic mode. This symbolic equivalency between Gabriel and Christ surfaces in the Gnostic Jewish-Christian equation of Gabriel and Christ, which implies that in Gabriel inheres a Christic “propensity,” and Christ possesses an “angelic” or “Gabrielian” dimension, both being “embodiments” of the Mighty Man of God, the Qur’anic and Sufi Perfect Man (Pleromatic Man), Gabriel in angelic mode, Christ in human and *avatic* mode.

The Jewish-Christian doctrine that Mary was an earthly manifestation of the Archangel Michael can be explained in the same way, as indicating that Michael possesses a Marian “propensity,” just as Mary embraces an “angelic” essence as Queen of the Angels, which metaphysically accords with Fatima’s traditional title of Lady of the Angels. The Annunciation would thus indicate the “meeting” of the angelic realities of “Gabriel” and “Michael.” Gabriel means “Mighty Man of God,” whereas Michael means “Who is like God?” This establishes both distance from and nearness to the Divine Reality; distance connotes the exoteric; nearness connotes the esoteric. In every unveiling, a residuum of veiling remains.

Sura *Maryam* 16-17 records that Mary “withdrew herself from her people to a chamber looking East, and took a curtain/veil [of the Temple] from them.” For Philo, the east is an allusion to the Garden of Eden, because according to *Genesis* 2:8 Paradise was located in the east (the word “east” also bears the meaning of “beginning,” indicating that this is the sacred east, not the geographic east). There in the Garden of Eden, Mary received a curtain or veil, for she is the Night of Concealment. *Malachi* 4:2 (= 3:20): “The Sun of righteousness shall arise, with health in *her* wings.” The word ‘sun’ in Hebrew, as in Arabic, is grammatically feminine. “Health” in Hebrew is *marpay*, a syn-

onym of *shalom*, “peace,” with which is also associated the ideas of wholeness and salvation. *Al-Qadr* sura ends as follows: “She is peace (*salam*) until the dawn breaks.” Both the *Malachi* verse and the *al-Qadr*aya may refer allegorically to the solar aspects of Mary and Fatima.

The “confluence” of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary is indicated by suras *Maryam* and *al-Ma'idah*. *Maryam* 29-30: “Then she pointed to him to answer them. They said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy? He spake. . . .” *Al-Ma'idah* 110: “I strengthened thee with the holy Spirit, so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle. . . .” In the first account, the cause of Jesus’ speaking in the cradle is the Virgin Mary’s pointing to him with her hand; the second account attributes the cause to the Holy Spirit’s assistance. Metaphysically viewed, this implies that Mary and the Spirit coincide, Mary being a manifestation of the celestial *Ruh* on the terrestrial plane. Mary pointed to Christ with her hand, which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit with reference to writing, thus to the *Kitab*. In *Luke* 11:20 Christ says that he expels demons “by the finger of God.” *Matthew* 12:28 records the same saying, but has Christ proclaiming that he expels demons “by the Spirit of God.” The finger, or hand, of God, and the Spirit of God are thus synonymous terms. Mary’s Hand is therefore a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so that we may say: *Manus Mariae Spiritus Dei est*; the Hand of Mary is the Spirit of God. The Shi’ite gnostic Seyyed Hayard Amuli in his *Asrar al-Shari’ah (Mysteries of the Shariah)* 3:9 ii gives the following interpretation of the incident involving Mary’s fast of silence and Jesus’ speech in his cradle: “. . . abstaining from outward speech effects an inward speaking that is a language of the inward soul. Therefore when Maryam remains silent with her tongue, ‘Isa utters words of manifest meaning in his cradle, claiming to be the caliph of the All-Merciful.” When we join Wisdom to the realities of the Holy Spirit and Mary, we arrive at a triadic confluence of the *Umm al-Kitab*. Thus the *Book of Wisdom* 10:21 ascribes the miraculous speech of infants to the agency of Lady Wisdom: “For Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of infants eloquent.” The triadic “configuration” of Wisdom, Mary, and the sacred *Ruh* opened Jesus’ mouth in his cradle.

archegos

15. The Virgin Maryam and the Divine Mercy

The name *Miriam* in Hebrew means “Bitterness.” The Virgin Maryam, viewed under her terrestrial reality, cannot but have participated in the “bitterness” of the boundaries of earthly contingency. Even the status she enjoys in Paradise is that of a creature. The “bitterness” of finiteness must therefore somehow typify even her sacred symbolism. Yet Maryam simultaneously embodies the divine peace, which being uncreated transforms the limitative horizon of bitterness into a gate opening out onto the infinity of the celestial *Salam*. According to Seyyed Haydar Amuli in his *Asrar al-Shari’ah* (*Mysteries of the Shariah*) 3:6, the peace we wish upon the saints constitutes “an overflow of God emanating and preserving from the world of holiness.” This interplay between the terrestrial and celestial dimensions of Maryam is indicated by the “conjunction” within her of the reception of peace (on account of her creaturely status with its attendant “bitterness”) and the simultaneous presence of the divine Names “All-Merciful” and “All-Compassionate” which embrace her and “consume” her finiteness in the divine Infinity.

The aspect of Infinity in Maryam alludes to her status as earthly manifestation of the celestial *Umm al-Kitab*, or Lady Wisdom. This in turn indicates that the bitterness and suffering which Maryam endured in history could not have been for herself alone, but for the sake of humanity, for whom she is, according to Catholic theology, “Co-Redemptress.” This is already indicated in the words of Simeon to the Virgin: “And thine own soul a sword shall pierce that the thoughts of all hearts may be revealed” (*Luke* 2:35). This verse immediately follows Simeon’s prophecy of the sufferings of Christ, indicating a sort of equivalency between the sufferings of Mother and Son. At the foot of the cross, the Virgin Maryam’s sufferings were neither for herself nor for her own sake, but she wept in labor to give birth to the ascended Christ (*Acts* 13:33 applies *Psalms* 2:7 to

Christ's resurrection: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"). This same mystery of the Virgin laboring to give birth to the ascended Christ is described in *Apocalypse* 12:2, 5: "And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered. And she brought forth a man child . . . and her son was taken up to God, and to his throne."¹ This birth is not the nativity, but the ascension of Christ. Naturally the imagery employed is that of the nativity, as related in the Qur'an: "And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: Oh, would that I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten" (sura 19:23). Yet these sufferings are again not for herself, but for the sake of humanity. In herself she did not suffer the pangs of childbirth, and this is the most ancient teaching of the Church, that the Virgin experienced a painless childbirth, which is consonant with the three doctrines of her own Immaculate Conception, of Christ's Virginal Conception, and of Christ's Virginal Birth. The 1st-century Syriac *Odes of Solomon* 19:8 is likely the earliest explicit reference to this tradition: "And she was in travail and bore a son, yet without pain, for it had been ordained so." We therefore see in sura 19:23 an allusion to the Virgin's yearning for the passive state and active station of *fana*, the mystical extinction of the illusory ego. Yet the Virgin had always embodied the reality of *fana*, so that sura 19:23 is presented as an example for the sake of humanity, for the Virgin stood not in need of that which she realized by and in her own nature; and when speaking of a personal "illusory" ego in the Virgin Maryam, one must bear in mind that the "ego" of what the Hindus might call an *avatar* is not as the ego of an ordinary human. It is therefore from this background, which views the Virgin's aspect of "bitterness" as a "redemptive"

¹ This same mystery of the Virgin's travail is present in *John* 16:21: "A woman, when she is in labor, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Here it is a matter of giving birth to the eschatological reign of Peace (*Salam*, and by extension, *Islam*), or to the Age of the Paraclete. The stresses in nature which are signs of the impending birth of the reign of Peace are presented in *Matthew* 24's eschatological discourse as labor pains: "Now all these are the beginnings of sorrows" (verse 8).

suffering for the sake of the world's enlightenment, that we must understand the essential positive significance of the lexically "negative" Hebrew name Miriam, "Bitterness." Her name denotes the world's bitterness which her own reality of celestial sweetness cancels.

The Names *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim*, which open the Holy Qur'an, are spiritually joined and metaphysically allude to the mystery of the Virgin Maryam.² In addition to the fact that the two divine Names *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* possess certain phonetic resonances with the name *Maryam*, we note here that the sacred mother's implicate presence in the *Fatiha*—she inheres therein as matrix of divine silence (*Silentium Dei*)—is metaphysically consonant with her being a manifestation on the earthly plane of the celestial *Umm al-Kitab*, viewed here as corresponding with the preexistent Lady Wisdom of the Jewish scriptures (*Proverbs* 8; *Sirach* 24; *Wisdom* 7). From this angle of vision, it is the secret, concealed presence in the *Fatiha* of Maryam, who is a theophany of the supernal *Umm al-Kitab*, which justifies the Prophet's designation of the *Fatiha* as the "Mother of the Book." Viewed in this light, the entire Qur'anic revelation is permeated with the revelation of the Maryaman mystery of simultaneous creaturely humility and plenary divine blessing.

The metaphysical association of the divine Names *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* with the Virgin Maryam recalls the analogical, anagogical application of various divine Names to Imam 'Ali in Shi'ite gnosis, as the following typical *hadith* of 'Ali illustrates: "I am God's Face . . . God's Hand; I am the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward."

The celestial aspect of the Virgin Maryam implies that although she is historically associated with exile in bitterness, she nevertheless manifests the divine peace, *Salam*; indeed, we

² One could not ask for any more precise Latin equivalents to the two principle Qur'anic Arabic divine Names for plenary Mercy and Compassion than the two following Latin superlative adjectival Marian invocations: *Mater Misericordissima*, *Mater clementissima*!—"Mother Most Merciful, Mother Most Compassionate!" One might also refer to verse 7 of the 1st-century Syriac *Odes of Solomon* no. 19, where it is said of Mary: "And thus did the Virgin become a Mother of immense mercies."

could say *Maria pax Dei est*, she is an expression of the very peace which we call down upon her. She is an exemplary model of the capacity for and affinity to the divine peace which all creatures possess primordially, given the origin of creation in the Creator, who is Peace Itself. As Fatima, according to Shi'ite gnosis, is the Night which in sura *al-Qadr* is designated Peace, so Maryam is likewise this same *Salam*, and her presence is the very fragrance of celestial peace, for she, like Fatima the exalted Lady of Light, is, as we have observed, a manifestation on the earthly plane of the preexistent supernal *Umm al-Kitab* viewed as Lady Wisdom.

To associate metaphysically the divine Names *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* with Maryam is symbolically fitting, for as is well known, these two divine Names are etymologically related to the Arabic word for "womb," and thus refer to the "feminine" divine realities. *Sahih Bukhari* (Vol. 8, Book 73, Numbers 17-18) records that Muhammad said: "The word 'womb' (*ar-rahm*) is derived from '*ar-Rahman*.'" A *hadith qudsi* reads: "I am *ar-Rahman* and the womb's name I derived from my name." A feminine celestial reality is most fittingly expressed on the earthly plane in and by a feminine vessel. The plenary mercy and compassion of a mother best represent and unveil the divine Mercy and Compassion. The Virgin Maryam, like Fatima, is the embodiment and revelation (or "apocalypse") of the divine Mercy and Compassion; in sura *Maryam* the divine Name *ar-Rahman* occurs more times than in any other sura. This indicates that Maryam is a *plenary* theophany of the divine Mercy. If Maryam is the manifestation of plenary Mercy, then sura *ar-Rahman* must be a Maryaman revelation; and this is confirmed in a certain sense by Islamic tradition, which calls sura *ar-Rahman* "the Bride of the Qur'an."

16. Sura 97 The Night of *Qadr*

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

Verily we sent him down upon the Night of Majesty.
And what is there that could explain to you the Night of
Majesty?

The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months!
The angels descend, and the Spirit enters into her,
By leave of their Lord, with the fullness of the Word.
Peace is she until the day dawns.

The Divine One is utterly Merciful in nature, utterly Compassionate in action. The sura *al-Qadr* concerns principally the descent of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel on the Night of *Qadr*, which may be translated as Majesty. The Night of *Qadr* alludes directly to the descent of the Qur'an via Gabriel and indirectly to the descent of the Spirit to Mary during the Annunciation and the Nativity of Christ. We would explain the Marian interpretation of this sura as follows. "Him" in verse 1 refers indirectly to Gabriel, and principally to the Qur'an, or Logos. The descent of the angels (plural) agrees with the Qur'anic account of the Annunciation to Mary, which fluctuates between the singular angel Gabriel and the plural form "angels." Sura 3:42 and 45 refer to the angels of the Annunciation in the plural: "And when the angels said: 'O Mary! Lo! God hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation.' And remember when the angels said: 'O Mary! Lo! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and in the world to come, and one of those brought near unto God.'" Gabriel as the singular angel of the Annunciation appears in sura 19:17: "Then we sent unto her our Spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man."

We now return to sura 97; regarding the phrase, “the Spirit enters into her,” while “her” in the Arabic text may refer to the “Night” upon, or “in” which the Spirit descended, a Marian allusion is also allowed.¹ “The Spirit enters into her” reminds one of the Qur’anic statement that God breathed of his Spirit into Mary in order to form Jesus in her womb (sura 66:12). Mary as symbol of the inscrutability of the divine decree is metaphorically represented as the dark Night; a similar Shi’ite exegesis sees the Night as Fatima.

“Peace is she until the day dawns.” The standard English translations do not do justice to the Arabic text in that they suppress the feminine pronoun *hiya*, as if the verse were merely saying that “there is peace in the night until dawn,” or that “the night was peaceful until dawn.” “She” certainly refers back to the “night,” but the pronoun also possesses a Marian connotation. Mary is peace, for she embodies and reflects that peace, *Salam*, which is both the etymological and the theological root of “submission,” that is, of *Islam*. In the context of the Annunciation, after Gabriel presents reasonable evidence of the truth inherent in his claim to Mary that she shall bear a son, the Virgin then fully submits “outwardly,” like the angels mentioned in sura *al-Qadr*, to the divine decree, the Word. In Mary there thus is a harmony (i.e. peace) established between reason and faith, a peaceful harmony between the divine and human.

The Church, in an accommodated sense, applies *Wisdom* 18:14-15a to the Annunciation and the Nativity: “For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty Word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne.” (These verses are the source of the popular Christmas carol, “It Came upon a Midnight Clear”). That the passage in *Wisdom* at the historical level of interpretation has reference to the descent of the Logos in order to judge humanity rather than to a peaceful descent of blessing, does not mean that the verses bear no relation to Mary. *Luke* 2:34-35 indicates that both the infant Jesus and his mother are signs of eschatological judgment and conflict: “Behold, this infant is set for either the

¹ See the exegesis of sura *al-Qadr* in Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an. The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999), 190ff. and 203.

fall, or for the resurrection of all in Israel, and for a sign which shall be assailed. And a sword shall pierce even you, that the thoughts of every mind may be exposed" (our translation from the Greek).

The Night is sacred, for in it the descent of the Word is accomplished. The Night is peaceful until the break of dawn. Yet after dawn breaks, not only is the promise of illumination realized, but judgment also looms on the horizon of history. The Lukan scenario of the descent of the Word and the apocalyptic polarization this brings with reference to both Jesus and Mary, are both paralleled also in the Prophet of Islam. He receives the Word, the Qur'an, and it leads not only to acceptance and blessing, but also to denial and conflict. The judgment delivered by the Word in *Wisdom* 18:14-16, appears as eminently "Muhammadan" in both divinely sublime and harsh aspects: "For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty Word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror into the midst of the land of destruction, with a sharp sword carrying thy unfeigned commandment. And he stood and filled all things with death, and standing on the earth reached even to heaven."

As the Word, according to *Wisdom* 18, judged the Egyptians for their social injustices committed against the disenfranchised Hebrew slaves, so Muhammad's central prophetic message in the social sphere was a demand to treat the poor, children, orphans, and widows with dignity, respect, and to bestow upon them concrete social assistance. This "Muhammadan" dimension of Mary, which agrees eminently with the Lukan model, is often overlooked by both Muslims and Christians, but it is no less an element of the Marian reality than the attributes of mercy and kindness so rightly associated with her. But this de-emphasis of Marian "harshness" is understandable, for the Marian Mercy represents her very essence, whereas the elements of division and conflict, while being unavoidable are nevertheless but "extrinsic" consequences which manifest themselves on the historical plane as well as in the *eschaton*.

Whereas sura 97 speaks of the angels and the Spirit *descending* on a night better than a thousand months, sura 70:1-4 informs us of the angels and the Spirit who *ascend* on

the Day of Judgment, a Day that will last 50,000 years: "A questioner questioned concerning the doom about to fall upon the disbelievers, which none can avert, from God, the Lord of the ways of Ascent. The angels and the Spirit ascend unto him in a Day the measure whereof is fifty thousand years." Just as sura 97 in its Marian application elucidates the blessedness and joy of the Annunciation, so in contrast, sura 70 announces the ominous judgment of the apocalyptic Day. That the Day of Judgment lasts 50,000 years indicates that though the divine punishment will be exacting, it will not be eternal in the strict sense of the word. The Fire of Wrath will be quenched by the Mercy of God which predominates over the attributes of Wrath and Justice. This is intimated to us by virtue of sura 70's naming of God, in the midst of the proclamation of judgment, as the Lord of the Ways of Ascent. The angels and Spirit ascend on the Day of Judgment. They ascend to God in contrast to the descent of sinners to hell. That God is the Lord of the Ways of Ascent furthermore teaches us that those who are subject to the "50,000 years" of the Fire will by degrees of purification ascend unto God, that is, achieve by grace the Beatific Vision effected by union with the *Ipsum Esse*. According to the *hadith Qudsi*, the divine proclamation "My Mercy hath precedence over my Wrath" is inscribed as an eternal witness upon the very throne of God. And the Qur'anic Throne Verse, by declaring the divine throne to be co-extensive with the cosmos, teaches humanity that the sway of the divine Mercy is ultimately universal and unlimited.

His Throne doth extend
Over the heavens
And the earth.
Sura 2:255

When God created the world, he recorded in his Book what is also written upon the Throne: "Verily, my mercy prevails over my wrath."

Hadith Qudsi

Sura 97: The Night of Qadr

The Holy One of Israel strengtheneth His Mercies above
His wrath.

Traditional Jewish Saying

And mercy exalteth itself above judgment.

Epistle of James 2:13

17. Sura *ar-Rahman* as Maryaman Sura

Sura 55, *ar-Rahman*, the All-Merciful, is intimately related to the Virgin Maryam. With its 31 refrains of “What is it, of the favors [mercies] of your Lord, that ye deny?” sura 55 constitutes the Qur’anic parallel to *Psalms* 136 (135), with its 27 refrains of the theologically equivalent Hebrew phrase: “For the mercy of the Lord endureth forever.” Thus in the Hebrew refrain is found the very title of sura *ar-Rahman*; furthermore, the two litanies share various themes and images, such as the sun, moon, and stars (*Psalms* 136: 7-9; sura 55:5-6). Sura *ar-Rahman* is the second “Maryaman” sura. In sura *Maryam*, the divine Name *ar-Rahman* occurs more times than in any other sura. A *Hadith Qudsi* proclaims that the Arabic word for “womb,” *ar-rahm*, is related to the divine Name *ar-Rahman*. The Virgin Maryam is the very “womb” of the divine Mercy. She is the *tajalli* (theophany) and manifestation of Mercy. Maryam is the *Umm al-Kitab* on a “personal” plane, just as the Qur’an, typified by the *Fatiha*, is called the *Umm al-Kitab* on the level of illiteracy. The supernal *Umm al-Kitab* remains on the level of pre-illiteracy the Archetypal Book. Therefore, the *Basmillah*, which opens the suras of the Qur’an, bestows upon the entire Qur’an a Maryaman fragrance, a sacred dimension which is Maryam herself.

Sura 55:1-2: “The All-Merciful has made known the Qur’an.” The *Umm* has revealed the *Kitab*, the Word, *Amr*. 3: “He hath created man”—by means of the *Umm al-Kitab*, the divine Wisdom and Word. 4: “He [the All-Merciful] hath taught him utterance.” Humanity reflects the *Kitab*. 5: “The sun and moon are made punctual.” The sun alludes to the *Umm* (“sun” in Arabic is grammatically feminine); the moon is the *Kitab*, for the latter is “derived” from the *Umm*, being a reflection of the plenary Mother containing all possibility. “Punctual”—for the two are harmoniously joined: *Umm* and *Kitab*. 6: “The stars and the trees adore.” The stars are other suns (according to a hadith

of 'Ali, the stars are the members of the *Ahlul Bayt*); the trees stand parallel to the *Kitab*; the trees are the individual words (cf. *Kalima*) of the plenary Word (*Amr*). Compare *Apocalypse* 12:1ff., where the cosmic Woman is clothed with the sun, with a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. The sun in one sense is Abraham, the moon Sarah or Hagar.¹ The trees adore; we recall here the five trees of Paradise (cf. the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* 19), which allegorically may symbolize the *Ahlul Bayt*, the House of Muhammad as individual emanations of the *Kitab*.

Sura 55:17: "Lord of the two Easts, and Lord of the two Wests." The two sunrises and sunsets; cf. the *al-Qadr* sura. He is Lord of the two Days and the two Nights; the two Days are Muhammad and 'Isa, the two Nights are Maryam and Fatima. But because the *Umm* and *Kitab* are joined in divine harmony, *Salam*, the alternating Night-Day symbolism is interchangeable, so that one may speak on the one hand of the *Nox lucida Sophiae*, the luminous Night of Wisdom. On the other hand, the light of the Logos entails a simultaneous dimension of veiling or darkening, for every revelation takes place on the plane of contingency, and thus participates in limitative, or darkening, forms. The Night-Day symbolism is also interchangeable given that in various Semitic languages the sun is grammatically feminine, so that Maryam can be simultaneously Night and Day. Night and Day, after all, are merely natural alternations of the movement of earth and sun, passive and active cosmic events.

The question arises: What is the connection between the stars and trees in aya 66? The stars are associated with the shade of night, just as trees are associated, especially in a desert, with the shade of day, a prefiguration of the coolness of night. Stars and trees thus constitute respectively direct and indirect symbols of the shade of night. Putting together ayat 5 and 6 we arrive at the following parallelism:

sun	moon
/	\
stars	trees

¹ According to Imam Sadiq commenting on sura *al-Shams* ayat 1-4, the sun is the Prophet and the moon is 'Ali.

The relation between sun and stars is self-evident. The moon is symbolically the shadow of the sun; likewise, the trees' shadows are cast by the light of the moon. In another sense, trees are the moon of the day, foretelling the night's advent.

In conclusion, the identification of sura *ar-Rahman* as a Maryaman revelation is supported by the fact that traditionally this sura has been called "the Bride of the Qur'an." We recall further, in passing, that the Shaykh al-'Alawi ceased memorizing the Qur'an after he had mastered sura *ar-Rahman*.² Perhaps this was all that was necessary for the perfection of his Maryaman soul.

² See Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century. Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 48.

18. The Light Verse with Reference to Muhammad, Fatima, Jesus, and Mary

God is the light of the heavens and earth;
the similitude of his light
is as a niche in a wall,
wherein a lamp is placed,
and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass;
the glass appears as it were a shining star.
It is lighted with the oil of a blessed tree,
an olive neither of the east, nor of the west;
it wanteth little but that the oil
thereof would give light,
although no fire touched it.
This is light added unto light;
God will direct unto his light whom he pleaseth.
God propoundeth parables unto men;
for God knoweth all things.

Sura 24:35

In the Qur'an, Jesus is associated with the east, Moses with the west; the Light Verse speaks of the divine light as being neither of the east nor of the west, leading some commentators to see in this aya a "limitative" allusion to these two major Prophets. Before addressing this view, we note that the verse does not exclude the directions of north and south from the divine light. The north symbolizes the upper heavens, while the south symbolizes the lower earth, in agreement with the opening of the Light Verse: "God is the Light of *the heavens* and *the earth*." North denotes celestial light; south denotes "terrestrial" light. Since all the prophets, which would by Qur'anic definition include Moses and Jesus, bring the divine light of guidance to humanity, and thus to earth, the divine light here referred to must not exclude Jesus and Moses. Therefore, the symbolic association of these

two prophets with the east and west should not be pressed too literally in this context, as if silence regarding the east and west suggested an exclusion from the divine light of two of the most important of the Qur'anic Messengers of the light of divine guidance.

The exoteric exegesis that identifies the light of aya *An-Nur* as the non-local *Nur Muhammadi* is justified from a certain perspective; but from the standpoint of essentiality, neither Muhammad nor any other Prophet can be identified with the divine light *as such*. Moreover, the light under discussion, as we have observed, is not actually non-local, given that the verse does not explicitly exclude the northern and southern directions; additionally, the light is "of the heavens and the earth," and therefore its localization is indeed universal. Regarding Christ, his historical mission was admittedly to Israel only, but nevertheless his sacred person and mission are a revelation for all of mankind, indeed, for the entire universe (sura 19:21), and this by virtue of his status as the Seal of the Saints. Similarly, the Virgin Mary as Mother of the Prophets must also be a universal sign, by no means restricted in sacred significance to her people Israel alone; as Frithjof Schuon has written, Mary in her *Magnificat* speaks of herself with reference to the divine promises made to "Abraham and his seed", and not exclusively to Isaac and his seed; Abraham includes all monotheistic Semites. . . ."¹

Muhammad as Seal of the Prophets confirms, synthesizes, and recapitulates the message/s of Moses and Jesus, and in so doing justifies, as we have said, the exoteric association of the Light Verse with the *Nur Muhammadi*. But from an esoteric point of view, this association must be not in an oppositional sense over against the previous Prophets, but in an integrative synthesizing sense that incorporates the universal company of the Prophets, the Seal of whom is Muhammad.

If we associate the light with Muhammad, then the phrase "Light upon Light" could at one level signify the House of Muhammad. The Qur'an states that for the faithful, the wives of the Prophet are closer to them than their own soul. As a cor-

¹ Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, 88-89.

relate, we could conclude that if such is true of his wives, who are not his own flesh and blood biologically, then his Family who are his own flesh and blood, above all Fatima, are the very soul of the faithful. This must mean that the faithful are the spiritual descendents and children of Fatima as Preexistent Lady of Light who dwelt around the divine Throne in pre-eternity.

Fatima's title Lady of Light is naturally associated with the Light Verse. God is the Light of the heavens and the earth, and Fatima is the feminine dimension of the divine light. Metaphysically viewed, Fatima, whose esoteric name means 'creator', 'maker', is a manifestation of the divine Wisdom, *Hikma*, which coincides with the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Mother of the Book, i.e., the Mother of the Word, of the creative Word. *Proverbs* 8 and *Sirach* 24 portray preexistent Lady Wisdom as the feminine witness to God's creative activity. Fatima, as well as the Virgin Mary who, as Louis Massignon observed, esoterically corresponds to the Prophet's daughter,² must therefore represent pre-eternal emanations of the *Umm al-Kitab*. They are both manifestations of Lady Wisdom on the earthly plane of existence. Diversity of person applies to the formal manifestation of the archetype Lady Wisdom, while the prototype in itself is unitive at the celestial level. *Proverbs* 3 states that Wisdom is the Tree of Life, and according to a well-known *hadith*, Muhammad ate from the Tree of Beatitude (*Tuba*) during a heavenly ascent, and from this fruit Fatima was conceived. Similarly, the Tree of Life is associated with the Virgin Mary in Christian symbolism. Fatima and Mary are mutual manifestations of celestial Wisdom on the earthly plane.

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth." The word "is" implies emanation of the cosmos. But inasmuch as the Light Verse excludes the horizontal dimension of east-west, but not the vertical relationship of north-south, the transcendence of the Creator is stressed, thus implying *creatio ex nihilo*. The verse thus integrates both models, emanation and creation, both of which require a Prime Mover.

² Louis Massignon, *Parole donnée* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1970).

From another angle, the Light Verse's exclusion of the east-west suggests to us that the divine Light is not bound within the confines of the oscillation or vicissitudes of day and night, or of the eastern sunrise and western sunset, both of which denote the passage of time. But the divine light, if it is free from the bounds of time, must also be free from the limits of space, assuming a unitive concept of spacetime. The velocity of contingent light implies both space and time, or better, spacetime, and the divine light is bound by neither dimension of this unitive spacetime.

The divine Light is neither of the east nor west; the east-west are singled out because they denote the light of sunrise (east) and sunset (west). There is no light (sunlight) associated with north or south, so accordingly there is no need to negate them explicitly in an exegesis of the Light Verse. East and west can therefore signify the totality of created light, thus suggesting that the divine light, which God is, is not to be identified with the created light. East and west have to do with the totality of light more than with its local or non-local nature. The light of God is not the light of sunrise or sunset, but though it is not to be identified with the created light, because God is light and the creator of terrestrial light, the divine light is the source of the cosmic light and "shines" transparently through it.

As far as created light is concerned, its totality on earth is indicated by the directions east and west. Therefore, in a certain sense, the two cardinal directions could stand for the total "local" field or parameters of light, so that they would, after all, indicate the non-local nature of the divine light. The local must originate from the divine, celestial "non-local" sphere, so that space emerges from a spaceless "point." We arrive at three categories of light: divine light (unmanifest); celestial light (formless); and terrestrial or cosmic light (formal). The second and third are manifest in the realm of contingency. *Lux prima materia est*; all things are light existing at different velocities or levels of "resonance." In this context, *Lux* denotes *Energeia*, energy.

"God is the light of heaven and earth." God is the source of the cosmic light. There is a single light that pervades the multiplicity of creation; the One is thus related to the Many. The multiplicity of creation issues forth from the One. The Qur'an

repeatedly proclaims that all things are from God, and all will return to God.

In its aspects of emanation or creation, the divine light is multifaceted and indeed multiple. The first line of the verse therefore refers to "heaven and earth," denoting the multiplicity that issues forth from the luminous divine One. The verse proceeds to describe the multiple "levels" or unfoldings of the single divine light, which according to the verse entails the following progressive constellation of unveilings, which all lead up to, and which all then follow from the central image of oil:

Niche > Glass Case > Lamp-Star > Oil < Lamp-Star < Glass Case < Niche

We have here four "layers" that constitute the unitary divine light. What are these various layers but figures for the realities of divine emanation, or *sefirot* as the Jewish Kabbalah would call them? "Niche in a wall"; the wall is the gulf, the barrier that separates (and also bridges) the Uncreated from the created. In this wall is found a niche, an enclosure that makes possible the emergence of the One into Multiplicity. "Light upon Light"; if God is light, and if there is in this luminous reality a differentiated "Light upon Light," then there must be a certain continuity between the One and differentiated Multiplicity, for "Light upon Light" clearly denotes a multi-layered light, a "multiplication" or better, a variegated unfolding of Light.

A *glass* case is set in the niche of emanation. The glass denotes transparency, luminosity, and reflection. The divine luminosity ensures that the divine is transparent and revealed to and in the multiple. As a consequence, this multiplicity, this creation, *reflects* the divine, so that humanity is the image of God, as a *hadith* of the Prophet states: "God created humanity in his image."

The glass appears as a shining star, not as the bright sun, but as a more distant, faint, and dim luminosity. This confirms that the One and the Many are not simply identical; Hindu thought accordingly stresses that there is not only a continuity but also a divide between Atman and the cosmos. Yet the fact that as one approaches them, the stars are actually seen to be just as luminous as our own sun, relativizes their distant aspect of faintness

by unveiling their true local brilliance, and this alludes to the continuity between the One and the Many. The lamp's luminosity is derived from the enclosed olive oil. This oil gives off a faint light even before it is lit with fire, that is, this oil has light as a latent and immanent quality. The oil's light comes not only from an "extrinsic" fire, but also from an immanent and intrinsic fire, namely, the divine light.

To understand this oil, we must bear in mind that it is from a "blessed olive tree neither of east nor west," that is, the tree is coterminous or coextensive with heaven and earth, with the entire cosmos, reminiscent of the Throne of God as portrayed in the Qur'anic Throne Verse. In other words, this olive tree is what is known as the World Tree, or Cosmic Tree; it is a symbol, among other realities, of the cosmos itself.

The oil of the World Tree possesses an immanent luminosity. This is the "latent" tendency of the divine towards emanation in the world of Multiplicity. The question then arises, what is the "extrinsic," or "transcendent" fire which is then added to the olive oil to produce the fullness of luminosity? In a Qur'anic context, we would suggest that this flame is the divine direction, or guidance, mentioned in the last lines of the Light Verse. In other words, it is the Prophetic light. The divine light is, after all, a light which illumines the Prophet, and this is the *Nur Muhammadi*. It is a universal light, for God has guided all peoples through the Prophets. In this context, "light" also bears a reference to the light of the divine Intellect, for by the Prophetic guidance, the human *intellectus* is illuminated by divine Intellection, so that humanity reflects the divine, in accordance with the *hadith*: "Know thyself, and then thou shalt know God."

In the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 77 Jesus says he is the Light, the All. The Sufis similarly identify the primordial Light with the *Nur Muhammadi*; it is the Prophetic light transmitted from Adam down through the line of the Prophets. The *Nur Muhammadi* is the light of God expressed in Muhammadan mode; yet all the Prophets share in the divine light. The Prophet is a created man, yet the divine light of which he is a theophanic manifestation, is, as a divine attribute, uncreated. The Word of God, like the divine attribute of light, is uncreated. The entry of the Word

of God onto the contingent plane involves time and therefore creation, and we return again to the mutual celestial and earthly aspects of each prophetic Messenger of the divine light.

19. Reflections on Christian Missionary Activity

Colossians 1:19-20, 23

Because in him, it hath well pleased the Father, that all fullness should dwell;

And through him to reconcile all things unto himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven.

This is the gospel which you have heard, which has been preached in all the creation that is under heaven.

The Christian scriptures record Christ's mandate to the apostles to preach to "all nations" (*Matthew* 28; *Luke* 24), to "all the world" (*Mark* 16; but this is a later interpolation to the text); according to *Luke* 24:47 "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations." In *Acts* 1:4 Jesus exhorts the disciples: "Do not leave Jerusalem," but then informs them in verse 8 that "you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth."

Jesus Christ, according to the canonical accounts, sent his disciples to all nations, to all the world. Paul interestingly proclaims in *Colossians* 1:23 that "the gospel has been preached," past tense, "to every creature under heaven." The past tense is strengthened especially by the past tense employed earlier in vv 19-20, which even more forcefully declares that every entity, every being, meaning everything that exists in heaven and earth, has been reconciled to God; the past tense clearly denotes an accomplished fact. The absoluteness of the statement that in effect the entire cosmos presently stands reconciled to God should at the very least give missionaries motivation to pause and reflect. Theologians have formulated theories that in effect water down and effectively empty the *Colossians* passage of much of its obvious force. The most popular of these interpretations

speaks of an objective and a subjective salvation, a distinction which in itself cannot be assailed. But in the final analysis, if the cosmos is not saved both objectively and subjectively—at least *sub specie aeternitatis*—then Paul's statement seems to be ultimately either meaningless or something akin to mere emotional hyperbole.

Before explicating the problem further, let us first elucidate precisely what, according to Christ's statements, the content of the disciples' teaching to the nations was to be. *Matthew* 28 speaks of teaching all nations what Christ taught the disciples, and of "baptizing" the nations "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." *Mark* 16:15, admittedly an interpolation, speaks of "preaching the gospel," or "good news." *Luke* 24:47 mentions "repentance and forgiveness" being preached, or announced, to all nations "in his name." *Acts* simply has Christ saying that the disciples "will be witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." The content of the "Great Commission" teaching is a delivering of the teaching of Christ, and not, note well, of the doctrines of the Church *about* Christ. Furthermore, this teaching of Christ includes the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness, which is of course the original preaching of Christ when he began his ministry: "Repent and believe the good news, for the kingdom of God is here." Lastly, this proclamation of Christ's teaching is to be delivered by his disciples "in the name" of Christ (*Luke* 24:47), or equivalently, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*Matthew* 28). The phrase "in the name of" does not refer principally to the ritual formula spoken at the ceremony of baptism. "In the name of" is an ancient legal phrase meaning "by the authority of," functionally equivalent to the modern legal concept of the power of attorney. The disciples are the legally authorized representatives of Christ, and the divine authority is plainly transferred from Christ to the apostles in the accounts of the Great Commission.

Before returning to the question of the cosmic reconciliation as accomplished fact, we should note that the phrases "in the name of" Jesus (*Luke* 24) and "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*Matthew* 28) are functionally equivalent terms. Christ always acted in the name of (i.e., by the authority of) God. In *Matthew* 28, Christ does not command the

disciples to go into all the world and spread doctrines about the Trinity. That is a legitimate subject for the Church to explore for her own self-enlightenment, and for intellection in itself, but it is not, according to Christ, to be the content of her preaching to the nations, for *Matthew* 28's statement clearly stipulates the content of the *kerygma* to be the *kerygma* of Christ, not *about* Christ, strictly speaking, though the two naturally and providentially were joined in the history of the Church. The Church's teaching and preaching, however, must be distinguished from each other in order to understand Christ's intentions in his Great Commission. Theological speculation about the Divine Essence, the nature of Christ, etc., certainly may enrich theological insights within the Church, and these rightly belong to the domain of the Church's *teaching*. But what the Church *preaches* must coincide with the preaching of Christ which he willed to be proclaimed to the nations, and this *kerygma* is contained in *Matthew* 22:36-40:

- 36 Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?
37 Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with
thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy
whole mind.
38 This is the greatest and the first commandment.
39 And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor
as thyself.
40 On these two commandments dependeth the whole law
and the prophets.

The same teaching is contained in a briefer form in *Matthew* 7:12: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law and the prophets." This *kerygma* is precisely a teaching that Christians, Jews, and Muslims can agree upon, at least in the realm of praxis.

Christian theological speculations on the Divine Essence and the nature of Christ are functionally and formally equivalent to various streams of theosophical thought encountered in authentic Jewish Kabbalism, Sufism, and Shi'ite gnosis. In Judaism and Islam, one is never forced to accept the esoteric doctrines of mystical initiates or gnostics; that is, the metaphysical doctrines are never part of the public proclamation imposed

upon the average faithful or upon converts. The Church is the only Abrahamic religious variant that has taken such a path, and though some positive trajectories have historically arisen therefrom, the results of such a position have proven to be largely divisive. In the beginning, the only disagreement between the Church and Judaism—not that the two were or presently are absolutely two separate religions in the archetypal sense—was whether Jesus was the promised Messiah. There was no disagreement about doctrines of Trinity or Christology, for both groups of apostles and their fellow Jews held the same monotheistic faith.

When Peter preached to the pious Jews on Pentecost, he spoke of the necessity of recognizing the messiahship of Jesus. For Peter this was in no sense a requirement to leave Judaism. Peter spoke of converting to God, not to a new religion; in any event, one converts to God, not to a religion. To “convert” to anything other than God is essentially a form of idolatry. All the apostles lived and died as faithful Torah observing Jews; according to the *Book of Acts* they continued to attend Temple services, and to offer the Mosaic sacrifices for sin. Accepting Jesus as the Christ had nothing to do with apostasy from Judaism. One must realize that Peter on Pentecost preached only to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast in question. These Jews, according to *Acts*, had gathered together “from all nations of the world.” The fact is that Judaism never required pagans to “convert” to the religion of Judaism in order to be saved or to avoid hell. On the contrary, Judaism has always held that pagans will be saved as long as they strive to live according to the natural law of conscience as embodied in the Noachide laws, which Judaism sees as God’s salvific covenant with the nations, a covenant which exists side by side along with the Mosaic covenant for Jews. The so-called “converts” or “proselytes” to Judaism from among the pagans were Gentiles who wanted to be circumcised in order to become full Jews, or “friends of the Jews” by adopting the entirety of the Jewish Torah requirements. This “conversion” was not required by Judaism for the salvation of non-Jews. These represented exceptional cases that were allowed, but never required in Judaism. These “converts” were not “saved” by circumcision, they merely became what were known as “Friends

of Israel.” This explains why Paul as a Jew never required circumcision of pagans—Judaism had never required anything of the sort. Paul’s conflict was with pagans who had converted to Jewish Christianity and who, with the fanaticism typical of some converts, required observances of Gentiles never imposed upon them by traditional Judaism. Is it not an irony for the Church to claim that it universalized salvation, whereas Judaism reputedly restricted God’s favor to only to the Hebrews (a claim found neither in the Jewish scriptures nor in Judaism at any period ancient or modern)? Judaism assured salvation to the nations as long as they followed the natural law of conscience, whereas the Church dogmatically restricted this universalism by largely confining salvation to its own formal system, though to be sure with certain esoteric openings toward universalism, such as the conciliar condemnation of the proposition that there can be no grace operative outside the visible boundaries of the Church.

Some extremist Hellenistic converts to Jewish Christianity developed a view that traditional Judaism would consider heretical, namely, that now in Christ, all nations must become full proselytes. Any normative Jew would have shuddered at the very idea, so restrictive and narrow-minded a view is this; and the Apostolic Council (see *Acts* 15) upheld the traditional Jewish law that pagans need not be circumcised, they need only observe the Noachide laws against sexual impurity, murder, and the like. Some Jews, to be sure, were uncomfortable mixing with pagans, but this was due to various extrinsic religious and ethnic sensibilities, and did not involve the idea that pagans were not saved because they were not Jews.

When Peter, according to *Galatians* 2, ate with Gentiles, he broke no existing Jewish purity law. Judaism never forbade Jews eating with pagans, as long as the Jew consumed no food forbidden by the Torah. The reason Peter once refused to eat with pagans was that he on that occasion suspected that the food he was being served was not kosher. Peter was not requiring pagans to adopt Jewish food laws; he was only requiring what Paul himself had agreed to at the Apostolic Council, namely that the Torah must remain in effect for Jews (and for Jewish Christians), whereas pagans (including Gentile Christians), in

accord with perennial Jewish legislation, need only observe the Noachide laws.

Given the Great Commission accounts that speak of a mission to the Gentiles, how are we to explain the fact that Peter in *Acts* 10 is completely unaware of any mission in the Church to preach to the nations? Obviously Christ never demanded “conversions” of pagans to Judaism, for Judaism never demanded such, and there is not a shred of evidence for such a demand on Christ’s part in any canonical or apocryphal (esoteric) gospel. As a faithful Jew, Jesus demanded only repentance to God and the praxis of morality from pagans. From this we may conclude that when in the Great Commission Christ told the apostles to preach to all the nations, insofar as the demand applies to pagans, it was not a demand to “convert” to any religion, be that Judaism or Christianity. Moreover, the phrase “all nations” refers on one level at least to *the Jews* of all nations. Peter’s example in *Acts*’ Pentecost narrative supports this contention, for it is specified that he preached to Jews “from *every nation* under heaven.” But as we have already observed, for Peter (as well as for Christ) this involved the recognition of Jesus as Messiah, and not an abandonment of Judaism in any sense.

According to *Acts*, at one point Paul gave up his mission to the Jews and turned to the Gentiles. For Paul then to make the statement in *Colossians* that the gospel has already been preached to every creature under heaven (phraseology reminiscent of *Acts*’ phrase: “Jews from every nation under heaven”) would mean that he considered the gospel to have been preached, past tense, an accomplished fact, to Jews of all nations, and to every creature under heaven.

This brings us to the crux of the matter: What precisely do the phrases “all nations” and “all the world” mean in the context of the Great Commission? The phrases mean essentially the entirety of the Roman Empire, or the world of Rome, and *Acts* would seem to support this interpretation. It is not hyperbole when Paul says the Roman Christians’ faith “is spoken of throughout the entire world,” because for Paul “the whole world” has limited parameters, namely, those of the Roman Empire, and of those nations who were in various forms of contact with the empire. This sheds light on the non-exhaustive yet

exclusive claim in *Acts* 4:12: "And there is no other name given among humanity whereby we must be saved." "Under heaven," in light of *Acts* 2 and other passages cited above, might refer to the Roman Empire and to those nations in contact with it.¹

That the original Jewish-Christian form of Christianity was eventually excluded by the Great Church and that many archetypal parallels of the former survived largely in Islam, so that Christianity as a whole has historically emerged as a Greco-Roman entity in thought and ritual, is certainly significant when we integrate the above interpretation limiting "the world" to the Roman Empire and its trading partners.

None of this is to deny the truly universal significance of Christ or of "Christianity." As the Qur'an states, Mary and Christ constitute a sign to all the worlds, to the entire cosmos. Yet this statement, as well as the Qur'anic proclamation of the universality of Muhammad's mission of Mercy to all creatures also implies certain "providential" limitations. That Islam has retained its specifically Arabic character wherever it has spread, parallels the essential Greco-Roman constitution of historical Christianity in both the east and west. The spread of Islam stopped at Europe's doors; similarly, the Church has made no paradigm-changing inroads into Islamic nations or cultures. The age of mass conversion of nations to this or that particular faith seems to have passed for now with the respective flowerings of Islam and the Church. Without speculating about future possibilities, the Church would seem to have evangelized the world it was intended to evangelize, just as Islam would seem to have spread to the world intended for it; yet the missionary activities of Christianity as well as of Islam retain theological validity as long as the universal and limitative aspects of such activity are respected.

The various advances of Christianity into some of the Far Eastern cultures are in many respects not a sign of an "absolute" universality of the Greco-Roman church, but are essentially a sign of the traditional open-minded and tolerant attitudes of

¹ On the providential limitations of Christianity and on the equivalence of the Roman Empire and the "world" in the New Testament, see Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 158-59.

Far Eastern peoples. This is not to idealize these peoples or their ideas, nor to demonize the Church, for we recognize that all social collectivities are composed of human beings and thus are afflicted with various prejudices on the formal plane. But the fact remains that the Church “co-exists” alongside such cultures in the particular lands under discussion, and the Church has not transformed, let alone replaced, their native cultures, be they Far Eastern or Islamic or Arabic. In this we see again the relativity and the limitations of the “universalizing” of the Church and her “cosmic” mission. The same limitative point might be made with reference to the current growing presence of Islam in the west.

In the Jewish scriptures, the Zoroastrian king Cyrus the Great is portrayed as foreshadowing the Messiah. This implies that Zoroastrians have their own salvific covenant with God, just as the Noachide covenant is a salvific covenant for all nations. The Qur’an teaches that every nation has its own messenger and its own religion. That the exclusivity of the Church in the Christian scriptures is not of an exhaustive nature is demonstrated by the references to the assurance of salvation to the nations who have nothing but the observance of the natural law of conscience; not to mention the absence of a single line in the New Testament regarding Christ or the apostles demanding a “conversion” to Judaism or to the Christian religion. For the New Testament, in continuity with the Hebrew scriptures, the “world” is composed of two “religions,” or better, “covenants,” namely, Judaism and the Noachide covenant. The Old and New Testaments criticize only those among the nations who do not follow the Noachide laws, that is, the natural law of conscience.

The light of the Gospel is the good news not about theological speculations concerning the nature of the Divine Essence or of Christ’s ontological status, but it is the light of Christ’s teaching which is summed up in the commandment to love God and one’s neighbor.

Viewed from yet another perspective, namely that which understands Judaism, Christianity, and Islam not as three separate religions, but rather as three variants of the single archetypal religion of Abraham, we can conclude that the separation of the nations into “Christian” and “Islamic” worlds or spheres is

truncated in some essential respects. If we view Christianity and Islam as the two Messianic variants of the Abrahamic triad (for both hold Jesus to be the Messiah), then we may view the “Christian” world and the “Islamic” world as two varying religious manifestations of “messianic” Abrahamism. This is to say that inasmuch as Islam embodies the surviving heritage, via archetypal parallels, of the original Jewish Christianity of Jesus and James the Just, we may arrive at the following conclusion: The Islamic cultures possess archetypal “Jewish-Christian” aspects, whereas the “Christian” cultures exhibit “Greco-Roman” Christian aspects. This is to say that the message delivered by Jesus, the message of love of God and neighbor, has triumphed in Islamic cultures in certain respects in an essentially (though not “formally”) Jewish-Christian mode, whereas in the “Christian” cultures of the Great Church the same teaching of Jesus prevails in Greco-Roman Christian mode.

According to the Qur’an, submission to God (*Islam* in its primordial sense) is “beyond all religion.” In the Haleem translation of sura 48:28, the addition of the word ‘other’ in brackets is an intrusion into the Arabic text which would appear to change the meaning significantly: “It was He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of Truth to show that it is above every [other] religion.” Would not the phrase “every [other] religion” here be better understood and rendered as “all religion”? The difference is marked; Truth as such transcends all religion in general, and all religions in particular. The same bracketed insertion occurs in 61:9 of the Haleem version, where the identical phrase from 48:28 is repeated. Islam is essentially submission to God, and only at a secondary level is it a particular religion on the formal plane. Submission to God is the essential element present in and transcending all the revealed religions, or religion in general. Qur’an 2:136 states there is no distinction made between the prophets, which would apply to the various religions founded by them as well. Haleem himself writes on p. xxiv with reference Dawood’s translation of Qur’an 3:85, “He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted of him . . .,” that “Those who read this word *islam* in the sense of the religion of the Prophet Muhammad will set up a barrier, illegitimately based on this verse, between Islam and other mono-

theistic religions.” *Islam* in the essential sense thus involves a manifestation on the historical plane of the primordial Religion, which in turn has manifested itself in varying modes throughout history within the various revealed religions.

PART III



AHLUL BAYT

THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE PROPHET

20. Reflections on the Shia-Sunni Divide

Frithjof Schuon propounds in his main essay on the issue of the Shia-Sunni split that both groups are valid paths within Islam, the two being orthodox variants and trajectories arising and emerging from varying yet compatible aspects of the Prophet's sacred person and personality.¹ The sacred person of 'Ali bestows the element of "Love," "Heat," "Humidity," and "Wine" upon Shi'ism, in contrast to the Muhammadan "Fear," "Cold," "Dryness," and "Water" of Sunnism, though these polarities are matters of interpenetrating accentuations rather than absolute distinctions.² The "split" between the two paths in Islam is moreover a necessary development that reflected celestial archetypal "realities" which predetermined earthly events "before the creation of the human world."³ On the extrinsic level, in distinction to Shi'ism or Sunnism as such, one can find much to criticize in both groups as concretely manifested on the plane of history. If Schuon offers critical observations with regard to various developments within Shi'ism, he by no means intrinsically criticizes Shi'ism, especially not its mysticism. Indeed, he spent much more space in his books criticizing various historical aspects of Sunnite Sufism than he did Shi'ism.⁴

¹ See "Seeds of a Divergence," Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*. Tr. by J. Peter Hobson (World of Islam Festival Publishing Co., 1976), 91-110; the same essay also appears as "Images of Islam," Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam. Essays on Esoteric Ecumenism*. Tr. by Gustavo Polit (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 1985), 181-202.

² *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 95.

³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴ For extended criticisms of various Sufi developments and manifestations, see Frithjof Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*. Ed. by James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2006).

Some of Schuon's criticisms are directed against extravagant Shi'ite Qur'anic exegesis;⁵ his point is valid, for there have indeed arisen extravagant interpreters in Shi'ism, yet Schuon also mentions in the same passage and elsewhere⁶ the fact that rather elaborate exegesis is also found in Sunni Sufism. Moreover, according to various traditions there are seven, seventy, or seventy thousand veils between God and humanity; we could justly apply the concept of such veilings to the Qur'an, so that the interpretation of the Qur'an could encompass seven, seventy, and even seventy thousand possible meanings, given that the Qur'an as manifestation of the "silent" *Umm al-Kitab* as universal matrix contains all metaphysical and cosmic meaning and possibility. Therefore a profoundly allegorical or anagogical exegesis of the Qur'an must be a possibility, though this could never replace the plain sense of the sacred text, a point which again justifies Schuon's critical stance towards the excesses of some Shi'ite as well as Sunnite exegesis.

It would be legitimate to view Schuon's criticisms of Shi'ism as being in conformity with his recognition that a providential preservation of the diversity of beliefs within Islam is necessary, a diversity which is itself a divine blessing, in accord with the *hadith* that the divergence of exegetes is a mercy from God. Regarding Schuon's criticisms of some Shia who "deify" 'Ali and the other saints of the *Ahlul Bayt*,⁷ any Shi'ite would be willing to admit that some have erred through extremism in this regard; yet much of Shi'ism's gnostic language regarding the "celestialty" of 'Ali is often intended to be understood as highly elliptical statements not to be taken literally; moreover, Schuon's esoteric teachings on the avataric nature of the Prophet of Islam, of Christ, and of the Virgin Mary⁸ would be no less or no more "excessive" from an "exoteric" Sunnite orthodox perspective

⁵ *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 103, 109.

⁶ See Schuon, *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, 19, 25, 33, 66, 112.

⁷ See *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 104, 109.

⁸ On Schuon's Marian metaphysics, see James S. Cutsinger, "The Virgin," in Mateus Soares de Azevedo (ed.), *Ye Shall Know the Truth. Christianity and the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Books, 2005),

than is Shi'ism's understanding of the celestial dimensions of the *Ahlul Bayt*; indeed, Schuon's Marian avataric doctrines might be evaluated as "excessive" even from an "exoteric" Christian perspective. Some Shia and Sunnis have certainly exaggerated the doctrine of the Prophet's and 'Ali's celestial natures, and therefore Schuon's criticism stands fully justified. The orthodoxy of both Sunnite and Shi'ite theologies in this regard can be defended, and in fact Shi'ism has never ceased to criticize, in common with Sunnism, the excesses of certain versions of the Christian dogmas of hypostatic union and trinity. Lastly, in the context of his discussion of 'Ali's "celestial substance," Schuon integrates both the Shi'ite and Sunnite understandings of the Household of the Prophet by granting to the Shi'ites that "the very existence of Shi'ism proves the particular greatness of the 'Prophet's House," and by simultaneously maintaining that the Sunnite "perspective" of a more expansive meaning and application of the term *Ahlul Bayt* is justified insofar as Muhammadan sanctity cannot be restricted to an "Avataric line," which is metaphysically justified given that "the Imams are identified with the Logos, but the Logos is not identified with the Imam."⁹

Schuon observes that Shi'ism holds as "Apostolic" all the writings of the Imams, and that this is equivalent to a Christian holding all of the ante-Nicene Church Fathers as equal in inspiration to the New Testament;¹⁰ this remark is justified, for some Shia, ignorant of their own theological heritage and theological norms, emotionally assume a plenary level of inspiration for the Imams' theological corpus. The various world religions often hold their early scriptural and theological commentaries as inspired in some sense and as doctrinally authoritative in contrast to later commentaries. This corresponds analogically, and therefore admittedly not fully, to the Shi'ite attitude concerning the Imams' writings. In any event, Schuon observes that Shi'ism also manifests a "concise and direct metaphysic" in its "mystical

107-62. On possible Christian exoteric, dogmatic reservations with regard to Schuon's Marian doctrines, see Cutsinger, 111-12.

⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰ Ibid., 109.

poetry,” so that again our author judiciously and graciously combines criticism along with praise.¹¹ Moreover, if a Shi’ite understands the Qur’anic inspiration as plenary and positive, in contrast to the Imams’ inspiration as “derivative” and flowing from the reality of the Final Prophet rather than being prior to or having priority over the Prophet and his mission, then we would arrive at a similar paradigm as encountered in the Catholic distinction between the positive and plenary inspiration of the bible and the apostles on the one hand and the “negative” and limited infallibility of the post-apostolic popes on the other hand. The papal analogy is justified in this instance given the perpetual necessity for the world and for the faithful of a living authoritative teacher to expound God’s Word, and as this office is filled and fulfilled by the Imams in the post-Apostolic period, in this regard they precisely parallel structurally and comparatively the theological justification for the papacy and papal infallibility in Catholicism. This is not to deny that vital differences exist between the varying understandings of the Imamate and the Papacy, especially with regard to the protracted period of the Great Occultation of the twelfth imam; our comments serve only to accentuate certain commonalities in order to advance a deeper understanding of the overlapping dimensions of the sacred realities under discussion in this context. The main distinctive to bear in mind here is that the Imams are in differing degrees assimilated to the Logos, whereas the Popes are not, with the possible exception of St. Peter, given the description of his celestial role and authority in *Matthew* 16.¹² Similarly, St. James the Just, “brother” of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, would seem to be assimilated to the Logos, for in the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 12, Jesus says that the heavens and the earth came into being for the sake of James the Just.

Having established certain correspondences between the Papacy and the Imamate, we might add that additional similarities (not “identities”) between Shi’ism and Catholicism might

¹¹ Ibid., 109-10.

¹² Let us not forget that according to Shi’ite tradition, the final imam, the Mahdi, is through his mother Nargis a direct descendent of St. Peter.

include an “Apostolic” status for tradition beyond the life of the Apostle, in distinction to the “hadith only” perspective of Sunnism reminiscent of Protestantism’s *sola scriptura* (“bible only”) position; an emphasis upon the cult of saints including visitation of tombs and other sacred sites; and an emphasis upon invocation of and devotion to Lady Fatima. As Schuon explains, Sunnism is the path of the Message whereas Shi’ism is the path of the Messenger, and by extension, of his Household.¹³ In this sense, whereas both paths of Islam give priority to the Qur’an, thus constituting a general analogy to Protestantism’s emphasis upon the bible, nevertheless, in Shi’ism a natural consequence flowing from the Qur’anic Message’s priority is the reality of the Messenger and his Household as manifested in the 14 Impeccables and Infallibles. Thus Scripture is complemented by Tradition, bringing Shi’ism into archetypal conformity with Roman Catholicism. As we have already observed, the Shi’ite Imamate stands in many respects parallel to the Papacy, with an important qualification that whereas the Imams are impeccable in their sacred character as well as infallible in teaching, only the latter category applies to the popes, and that in a “negative,” “protective” sense. We may therefore justly observe at this point that although it would seem that Protestantism in many ways parallels Islam in general, and although Shi’ism in particular also parallels Christianity in general more than does Sunnism, at the same time many of the unique emphases of Shi’ism more closely parallel Catholicism than Protestantism; in various respects Sunnism admittedly more closely resembles the simplicity of Protestantism than the complexity of Catholicism. Naturally many distinctives exist between Shi’ism and Catholicism, and several more similarities could be listed between Sunnism and Catholicism, and certainly overlap between all four groups is to be expected, given their common origin in the single Abrahamic religious archetype. In the end, just as, according to Schuon,

¹³ *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 100. For an examination of parallels and differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, as well as Christianity’s correspondences and divergences with Islam in its two branches, see the essay, “The Question of Evangelicalism,” Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam. Essays on Esoteric Ecumenism*, 15-53.

the three great branches of Christianity, namely Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, all constitute valid paths, so in Islam both Sunnism and Shi'ism represent orthodox traditions emanating from equally valid aspects of the Prophet's sacred person and personality.

As for the sensitive issue of Shi'ite "criticism" of Aisha, Abu Bakr, and others of the same stature, if the criticisms were intrinsic in principle, then they would indeed be deplorable, and Schuon's remarks on the subject at hand are in any event manifestly justified.¹⁴ But if certain accusations are rooted in providential concerns, namely, for the maintaining of legitimate differences of rites and theological traditions, above all by means of critical or forceful diverging accentuations, then we would obtain a similar situation as is encountered within the divisions of Christianity. The Protestants, for instance, at times hurl accusations against St. Peter in favor of St. Paul, and at times speak harshly of the Virgin Mary, not to mention a general negative animus against the Catholic Saints in general. Even a cursory reading of the Church Fathers will reveal that many of the Protestant positions are rooted, in varying degrees, in the patristic literature, as well as in the New Testament itself. Conversely, Catholicism cannot but "protest" against Luther, notwithstanding the fact that much of his thought is intrinsically Catholic in spirit, often in line with orthodox authors of the magnitude of St Augustine and Tauler. If Protestants deflect honor from Mary, it is not uncommonly in deference to and in honor of Christ, and therefore the intention is not to attack the Virgin directly, and if Catholics condemn Luther, it is more likely than not in order to honor Christ.¹⁵

¹⁴ For his comments on the subject, see *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 92-99, 105.

¹⁵ Consider Schuon's justification of Luther's attacks on various sacred realities and traditions in *Christianity/Islam*, 28-29, 49; the same author offers a similar argumentation with regard to Shi'ism and Sunnism in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 105-06, when he insists that at the extrinsic level "Shi'ism is able to reject . . . certain venerable personages for the same reason that Islam rejects" Christianity's understanding of Christ, and neither of these instances can constitute "intrinsic heresy" (105).

With regard to Schuon's observation that certain Shi'ites displace the esoteric dimension onto the exoteric plane, as evidenced by the "third" testification of 'Ali in the Shahadah,¹⁶ this criticism is justified in that some Shia indeed place the esoteric upon the exoteric plane; the same tendency is found in Sunnism, in different modes and degrees than in Shi'ism to be sure. There are admittedly additional significances in the inclusion of the third testification, including the preservation of a providential division between the Sunnite and Shi'ite paths; but that for Shi'ism the third testification does not possess an absolute character is demonstrated by the fact that in Shi'ism the third testification is not considered obligatory, since Shi'ite authorities insist that although its recitation is "commendable" as a sign to distinguish oneself as one of the Shia, it is nevertheless "not a part of the *Azan* or the *Iqamat*."¹⁷

With regard to Schuon's statement that he is inclined to see in Shi'ism certain outside influences from pre-Islamic Persian religion, we must first observe that he stresses that this applies not necessarily to Shi'ism as such, but "above all—or at the very least—" to "its extreme and relatively late forms."¹⁸ Secondly, the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian faith was a heavenly revelation, representing from one possible point of view an orthodox "reformation" of Hinduism. Moreover, Schuon's phraseology in this context is not absolute, for although he admittedly presents his judgment forcefully, he nevertheless does not make a definitive pronouncement about such outside influences, writing that they "seem to us probable, if not certain. . . ."¹⁹

Schuon's metaphysical system recognizes the divine origin of the traditional Great Religions revealed by Heaven, and that there can be a providential integration of certain elements from

¹⁶ *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 101.

¹⁷ *The Holy Qur'an*. Arabic Text, with English Translation and Commentary. With Special Notes from Ayatullah Agha Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi. Translated by S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali. 4th ed. (NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 2004), 112a.

¹⁸ *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, 108.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

earlier religions into later religions is also admitted. One could argue with regard to Shi'ism that what might have been integrated therein from Zoroastrianism was done so providentially, and that the "borrowed" elements ultimately "originated" as the result of archetypal forces compatible with various aspects of the sacred person of the Prophet and of the various persons of the *Ahlul Bayt*. Schuon's observation on the subject may be viewed as serving to emphasize divergences which are spiritually necessary in order to preserve the legitimate distinctions between the Sunnite and Shi'ite paths. Such an accentuated interpretation of Schuon's criticisms of Shi'ism is moreover suggested by the fact that the ultimate, or most central, element of his essay on the Shia-Sunni divide is that both paths are essentially orthodox manifestations originating from complementary dimensions of the Prophet's sacred person, that both groups are to be praised at the intrinsic level and criticized at the extrinsic level.

Throughout his Shia-Sunni essay, Schuon displays an incredibly sophisticated argumentation that constitutes an impressive tour de force of sacred metaphysical dialectic, which while not resolving all tensions between the competing complementarities, nevertheless does demonstrate that what at first appear as absolute contradictories are in fact complementarities with differing outward forms and perspectives, which like the varying cardinal directions of North, South, East, and West must all be preserved and never confused. In any event, the split and divergences between Sunnism and Shi'ism are of an extrinsic order and cannot be ascribed to "hypocrisy," "baseness," or "petty and sordid self-interest."²⁰ In the final analysis, the divergences involved in the Shia-Sunni divide are but earthly manifestations and reflections of providentially predestinated celestial archetypes and "symbols" of a pre-eternal order.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., 94.

²¹ Ibid., 98.

21. The *Ahlul Bayt* and Qur'anic Esoteric Veils

The Qur'an was revealed in the Night of Majesty. The "Night" is Fatima, the Lady of Light. She is the pure matrix of receptivity open in the darkness of emptiness to the divine descent. Fatima symbolizes the feminine aspect of the Universal Intellect, the Spirit, and the *via negativa* by which we perceive through contemplation the Face of God. David in *Psalms* 36:9 declares, "In thy light shall we see light." The vision of God is our light, we see through the *theoria*, the contemplation of the divine Intellect. God is the sight by which we see, and his Light is Fatima. "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (*Genesis* 1:3), and this is allegorically equivalent to the *Lux Fatimae*. The Holy Imams associate the name Fatima with the divine Name *al-Fatir*, "the Creator." Accordingly, the mystery of Fatima lies concealed anagogically in sura 35, *al-Fatir*. The alternating interplay of Fatima as darkness and light is indicated in aya 13: "He maketh the night to pass into the day and He maketh the day to pass into the night." The aya continues: "He hath subdued the sun and moon to service. Each runneth unto an appointed term." The sun is the *Nur Muhammadi*; the moon is Imam 'Ali. Each has an appointed term, the Muhammadan esoteric domain, and 'Ali's esoteric reign. Both their terms culminate in God, as aya 18 concludes: "Unto God is the journeying."

Similarly, the gold and pearl armlets, and the silk raiment of the Paradise of Eden in aya 33 correspond to the gold of the Prophet, the pearl-purity of 'Ali, and the silk of Fatima. Through these three, God removes the grief referred to in aya 34. In ayat 34-35, the triad of forgiveness, bounty, and grace, once again refers to the Prophet, 'Ali, and Fatima. By these three Infallibles, God installs the faithful "in the mansion of eternity" (aya 35). Aya 38's phrase "Unseen of heaven and earth" connotes the esoteric essence of Muhammad and 'Ali, and the "secrets of the breasts" relates to Fatima's esoteric essence. Aya 41 affirms the

Infallibility of the *Ahlul Bayt*, in that it proclaims that the heavens and the earth, or Muhammad and 'Ali, deviate not.

Sura 38 contains similar ayat which may be allegorically applied to the *Ahlul Bayt*. Aya 10's "treasures of mercy" alludes to the Household of the Prophet. Aya 47: "Lo! We have purified them with a pure thought, remembrance of the Home," this Home is the Household of Muhammad. In aya 52, Muhammad is the fruit of Paradise, and 'Ali is its cool drink. Aya 53 completes the Edenic triad of rewards by alluding to the *houris*, and anagogically these can be understood as refractions of the graces of Fatima.¹ Aya 53's association of Paradise with the *Ahlul Bayt* finds an echo in the esoteric *Gospel of Thomas* logion 19, which speaks of the five trees of Paradise, which allegorically considered are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain: "Blessed is he who existed from the beginning, before he existed. If you come to exist as my disciples and if you will hear my words, these stones will be your slaves, for to you belong five trees in paradise which stay green in summer and winter, and their leaves do not fall. He who will know them will not taste of death." These are the same trees referred to in Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn's "Whispered Prayer of the Gnostics": "O my God, grant that we may be found among those within whose breasts are gardens of trees of longing for Thee, trees which have taken firm root." Aya 67, "Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them." The heavens represent Muhammad, the earth is 'Ali, and between these two lights is Fatima, known as the Confluence of the Two Lights (see also ayat 11 and 28). *Genesis* 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," that is, Muhammad and 'Ali; "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light," that is, the light of Fatima. Aya 76 informs us that Adam was made by the two hands of God, and these are Muhammad and Fatima under the attributes of divine masculine Word and feminine Wisdom. The doctrine and mystery of the *Ahlul Bayt*, the Holy House of Muhammad, are "tremendous tidings" (aya 68).

¹ According to various Shi'ite gnostic traditions, Fatima, conceived from the fruit of a heavenly tree of light, was a preexistent *houri* of Paradise who was manifested on the earthly plane as a human.

We now approach sura 32, *al-Sajdah*, "The Prostration." Aya 2, "the Lord of the Worlds" are the worlds of the Inward and the Outward, of "the invisible and visible" alluded to in aya 6. Sura 57:3: "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things." The reference to the divine Knowledge in 57:3 is paralleled in sura 32:6: "Such is the Knower of the invisible and the visible, the Mighty, the Merciful." Sura 35:38: "Lo! God is the Knower of the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. Lo! He is Aware of the secret of (men's) breasts." From one perspective, the Outward and Inward are the exoteric and the esoteric; from another angle, the Outward is the Prophet as transcendent heavens, while the Inward is 'Ali as immanent earth, or gnosis. Sura 57:3 sets the First and the Last parallel to the Outward and the Inward. The Outward comes before the Inward because Muhammad precedes 'Ali, for the exoteric must be deepened or pierced and shattered in order that the esoteric may shine through it. From yet another perspective, the Qur'an places the Invisible before the Visible, assuring us of the essential precedence of esoterism over exoterism. Finally, we recall that according to al-Ghazali, "heaven" can denote "inward vision."² Thus the esoteric inward vision of heaven can also symbolize 'Ali rather than the Prophet; of necessity, the inward and outward interpenetrate both Muhammad and 'Ali, allowing a certain reciprocal fluidity in the symbolism at hand.

According to sura 32:4, God created the heavens and the earth and what is between them; after the mention of the six days of creation, aya 5 refers to "a Day whereof the measure is a thousand years." This is paralleled in the *Epistle of Barnabas* chapter 15:4, which teaches that the six days of creation represent the six "millennial" periods of earthly history. Aya 7, "Who made all things good which He created," confirms the *Genesis* 1:10 doctrine, "And God saw that it (creation) was good." Aya 9 says of humanity: "Then He fashioned him and breathed into him His Spirit. . . ." Again, in accord with *Genesis* 2:7, "And God breathed into his face the Spirit of Life." The *Spiritus Vitae* denotes the

2 See Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, 59.

celestial dimension of humanity, in contrast to the clay, which represents the terrestrial dimension. Since this *Spiritus* is of God, it should be written in upper case; it is certainly the divine Spirit and therefore we are justified in concluding that the *Spiritus Vitae* denotes the celestial dimension of humanity. "The angels and the Spirit descend therein. . . ." God breathed the Spirit into Adam, just as he breathed into Maryam and Fatima, on the Night of *al-Qadr*. Aya 11 teaches us that after death "unto your Lord ye will be returned." *Genesis* 3:19 refers to the body of clay, "for dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return." But the *Spiritus Vitae* is from God and will return to God. The Spirit is Wisdom, of whom Fatima is an emanational refraction (as is the Virgin Mary, with a different nuance though, for only of Mary does the Qur'an explicitly state that she is blessed above all women of the worlds). Jesus referred to this mystic truth in his allegorical action of fashioning birds of clay and breathing the *Spiritus Vitae* into them, by leave of God. Again, this denotes the animation of the terrestrial dimension by means of the infusion of the celestial dimension in the mode of the *Spiritus Vitae*. Lastly, a *hadith* of Enoch (Idris) proclaims: "Wisdom is the Spirit of Life." Lady Wisdom is the Spirit of Life.

22. The Esoteric Kingdom of Prophecy and Wisdom

The Uwaysis are the Islamic mystics initiated in the realm of the Spirit directly by the saint al-Khidr. The chain of transmission which conveys the *baraka* of the Prophet is not broken on account of the non-corporeal nature of the Khidr initiation, for the unseen is more real than the seen: "For the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal" (2 *Corinthians* 4:18). The Uwaysis are alone, spurned as it were by their contemporaries, for these mystics have not been entrusted with the standard physical, or "manual," transmission of the *baraka*. Fatima is the *manus Dei*, the Hand of God, and it is this Hand which transmits the Prophet's *baraka* to the Uwaysis. Their aloneness makes them the Solitary Ones, the *Afrad*, an Arabic word which corresponds exactly to the Coptic noun *mon-akhos* found in the *Gospel of Thomas* logia 49 and 75. Logion 49: "Jesus said this: 'Blessed are the solitary [= unitary] and chosen ones, for you will discover the kingdom, for you are from the kingdom and will return to her.'" The word "discover" reflects the Coptic verb *he*, which is difficult to translate precisely. In logion 2, it is said that "whoever *he e* the interpretation of these sayings will not taste of death." *He e* means literally "falls upon," and the logion's context (see logion 3 which commands one to "seek" and to "find") indicates that the phrase means "to find," "to discover," "to come upon through diligent search." Logion 49 is paralleled in a number of Qur'anic ayat which speak of the believer's origin and return to God. Sura 7:29: "As He brought you into being, so will ye return (unto Him)."

Logion 75: "Jesus said this: 'Many stand at the door, but the solitary [= unitary] ones will enter the marriage chamber.'" A *hadith* of the Prophet reads: "I am the house of Wisdom and 'Ali is its Door." "Many stand at the door," says the *Gospel of Thomas*. 'Ali is this door, and the house of Wisdom is the very same

kingdom referred to in the Thomas gospel logion 49, which says of the kingdom, that the solitary ones will “return to her.” This “she” encompasses the divine Wisdom, the Qur’anic *Umm al-Kitab* (the “Mother of the Book”), whose manifestation upon the earthly plane in the Islamic dispensation is Fatima. The *Ahlul Bayt*, the People of the House, the family of Muhammad; the kingdom is the House of the Prophet, and in a wider sense, the kingdom of the Prophets, or the kingdom of Prophecy as such. To discover the kingdom implies that one must seek it, which in turn must mean that this kingdom is hidden; thus it is the *esoteric* kingdom of Prophecy we are discussing. The gate, or door, to this kingdom is the very theophany of esoterism, ‘Ali. From one angle of vision, Muhammad is Heaven and ‘Ali is Earth.¹ Fatima, moreover, is Paradise, the Garden of Eden, for Fatima was conceived from the jeweled-fruit her father ate from the Beatific Tree of Paradise; according to a *hadith* of the Prophet, he said of Fatima, “I smell the fragrance of Paradise emanating from her.” Moreover, one of Fatima’s traditional titles is *Khatun e-Junat*, “Lady of Paradise.” In logion 75, to enter the bridal chamber means to enter the Garden of Eden, which in Islamic symbology is inhabited by the *pure houris*, who represent theophanic refractions of Fatima, the Edenic theophany herself. Logion 19 declares there are five trees in Paradise which bestow immortality. These five trees are allegorically, as we have asserted, the five members of the *Ahlul Bayt*. From another equally valid point of view, ‘Ali is heaven², in the sense that heaven is esoteric, hidden, concealed from mortals because it is distant and separated from the earthly plane (transcendent), whereas Muhammad is the earth, the revealed Messenger whose mission pertained historically to the exoteric dimension, the kingdom of the earth, the seen. Thus the kingdom is “within you,” concealed from view, and “outside you,” literally “manifest to the outer eye,” according to Thomas logion 3, which in this

¹ In this context, “earth” means the *Terra lucida*; see the following footnote’s reference to ‘Ali’s earthly light.

² Sayyid Sharaf al-Din Astarabadi in his *Ta’wil al-Ayat* commenting upon sura *al-Hadid* aya 28 records a *hadith* of the Prophet according to which ‘Ali has two lights, a light in heaven and a light upon earth.

way anagogically alludes to Muhammad's and 'Ali's supernal royalty. The same inner and outer domains of royalty are spoken of in sura 41:53: "We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth." The "horizons" pertain to the exoteric witness of Muhammad, the "within" pertains to the esoteric "celestuality" of 'Ali, and the "it" of the phrase "it is the Truth" refers simultaneously to Fatima and the Mahdi.

"But the kingdom of God is both inside you and manifest to the outer eye. And when you find the kingdom, you will know who you are, and you will be known, and you will see that you are children of the father who lives" (*Gospel of Thomas*, logion 3). The kingdom of God is both inward and outward, that is, esoteric and exoteric. The discovery of this kingdom which embraces the esoterism of 'Ali and the exoterism of Muhammad will result in divine gnosis: "You will be known," that is, you will be known by God; God will know Himself in you by Himself, by His own self-knowledge. These gnostics are "the children of the father who lives." According to traditional Islamic philosophy and theology, the term "Sacred Father" denotes the Tenth Intelligence, or Active Intellect, and therefore the subject of knowledge is joined with the theme of the father in logion 3. Consider *Odes of Solomon* 7:9: "The Father of knowledge is the word of knowledge." Moreover, *Thomas* speaks of "the father who lives." The Father-Intellect is said to be "living" because as Plotinus teaches, to know is to be, knowledge is being, Being is Life.

We have identified Fatima as a manifestation on the earthly plane of the preexistent Lady Wisdom known from the Jewish scriptures. And we have equated this Lady Wisdom with the Qur'anic *Umm al-Kitab*, the preexistent Mother of the Book, that is, the Mother of the divine *Amr*, the *Word* of God. In her solar mode of esoterism, Fatima is the Lady of Light, *al-Zahra*. In her lunar mode of esoterism, she is the "Night" of Majesty, according to Shi'ite interpretation of sura *al-Qadr*. As the "night," the Prophet's daughter "is peace until the day dawns" (sura 97:5), that is, until her solar modality once again manifests itself. Under her lunar aspect, Fatima is the concealment symbolized by the night, and as such we have here an allusion to the purest modality of esoterism. "I am dark but beautiful" (*Canticle of*

Canticles 1:4) may in all justice be applied to the sacred reality of Fatima.

The Lady of Light's illumination is none other than that of God, who "is the light of the heavens and the earth." That this luminosity, according to the Light Verse, "is neither of the east nor the west" denotes that in its essence it is ever bright, in contrast to the fluctuating light of the sun at its rising in the east and its setting in the west. The alternating dimming and unveiling of the sun are not of the essence of the light, but merely reflect the oscillating perspectives born of the limitations of the human consciousness' perception. According to sura *al-Qadr*, the Word (*Amr*) in all its fullness (*Kul; Pleroma*) descends on the Night of Majesty. The light of God's Word must of necessity be revealed in the night, for the night is a symbol of Peace, of *Salam*, and by extension, of *Islam*,³ which emerges from both surrender and its resultant peace. Peace denotes rest, passiveness; yet such passiveness is in truth the receptive matrix of the active *Amr*, or proclamation. Thus we arrive at an *active* surrender, the jihad (literally, 'struggle', 'striving') of surrender. This mystery is alluded to in the Qur'an, which speaks of those "who struggle *in God*" (sura 29:69). To struggle in God presupposes an indwelling in the divine mystery. The immanent presence of believers "within" the divine presence entails far more than a passive quietude. The believer is certainly the House of God, where the Divine One dwells in the fragrance of celestial peace. Yet this peace, this "Islam," is inseparable, in the realm of contingency, from jihad, struggle. Jihad involves the strivings related to both the spiritual life and the intellective powers on the *via* to attainment of the

³ In the Christian dispensation, the female disciple of Christ named *Salome* personifies the mystery of Islam, for the name Salome is merely the Hebrew word for Peace, *Shalom*; the word *Islam* is cognate with the Arabic word for peace, *Salam*. The *Gospel of Thomas* logion 61 reveals the mystery of Salome as the esoteric truth of the Solitary Ones, those who are alone and one, reflecting the Unity of God: "Jesus said this: 'Two will rest on a bed; one will die, one will live.' Salome said this: 'Who are you, man, to make your way so quickly onto my couch and then to eat from my table?' Jesus said this to her: 'I am he who came from the One; I have received of my father.' 'I am your disciple.' 'And so I say this: If my disciple be unified, he will be full of light, but if he be divided, he will be full of darkness.'"

eternal truths of reality as contained in the theophanic mysteries of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima, or the terrestrial, celestial, and paradisaical realms of the divine kingdom.

* * *

The first-century Jewish-Christian *Odes of Solomon* 12 eminently accords with the realities of the Prophet and 'Ali, and for the sake of completeness we quote it here *in extenso*:

1 He hath filled me with words of truth; that I may speak of Him;

2 And like the flow of waters flows truth from my mouth, and my lips show forth His fruit.

3 And He has caused His knowledge to abound in me, because the mouth of the Lord is the true Word, and the door of His light;

4 And the Most High hath given it to His works, which are the interpreters of His own beauty, and the repeaters of His praise, and the confessors of His counsel and the heralds of His thought and the instructors of His works.

5 For the swiftness of the Word is inexpressible, and like its expression is its swiftness and force;

6 And its course knows no limit. Never doth it fail, but it stands sure, and it knows not descent nor the way of it.

7 For as its work is, so is its end: for it is light and the dawning of thought;

8 And by it the worlds talk one to the other; and in the Word there were those that were silent;

9 And from it came love and concord; and they spake one to the other whatever was theirs; and they were penetrated by the Word;

10 And they knew Him who made them, because they were in concord; for the mouth of the Most High spake to them; and His explanation ran by means of it:

11 For the dwelling-place of the Word is man: and His truth is love.

12 Blessed are they who by means thereof have understood everything, and have known the Lord in His truth. Hallelujah.

23. The *Ahlul Bayt* and the Divine Names

There is no God but God;
Muhammad is His Messenger;
'Ali is His Ally;
Fatima is the Confluence of the Two Lights;
Hasan and Husain are the Infallible Signs of God.

"There is no God but God." There is no Reality except Reality, there is nothing but the reality of God, for anything that is not real does not exist. Therefore, anything that "is" must "be" as a refraction, or a reflection, of God, as intimated in the following aya: "Withersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God" (2:115). Based on these considerations, if there is no reality but God, then the lines quoted above testifying to the realities of each member of the *Ahlul Bayt* must ultimately refer back to God, in the sense that all cosmic manifestations are reflections of the divine. The statements on Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain are consequently commentaries upon the unfoldings or unveilings of the reality which is God.

The very names of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima are derived from the divine Names "the Praised," "the Exalted" (or "the Most High") and "the Creator" respectively.¹ All three are revelations of the eternal. To be sure, they are not to be identified with the eternal unrevealed, unmanifest divine Essence, but rather as revelations, reflections of the "unreflectable" upon the plane of cosmic manifestation.

Muhammad and 'Ali are the Two Lights, of which Fatima is the Confluence. One might claim that Fatima's light is derived from Muhammad and 'Ali. In one sense this is true, but by virtue of the fact that ultimately God is the light of the heavens and the

¹ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism. The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, 30.

earth (heaven and earth referring allegorically to Muhammad and 'Ali),² then Fatima stands on an equal "luminal" plane with her father and husband, thus justifying her title Lady of Light. And let us not forget the Shi'ite title of Fatima, "Mother of her Father" (*Umm Abi'ha*). According to *Zohar* 1:29b, the *Shekhinah* generates heaven and earth.

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth, the light of Muhammad and 'Ali, of exoterism and esoterism. These pairings, which also pertain to subject and object, these "opposites" are transcended in and by Fatima, who is the matrix of the *conjunctio oppositorum*. The "transcendence," the "ascendance over" the opposites is effected through Fatima's assimilation of the reality of 'Ali as "the Exalted," which can mean "the Ascending," or "the Transcending." The Transcendence-Exaltation ('Ali as Exalted, the High One, by an inverse or converse metaphysical application connotes heaven, rather than earth) is in turn effected through the Paracletic dimension of Muhammad, the Praised One. Transcendence is therefore effected through praise and glorification, such as through the worshipful invocation of the litany of the Divine Names. The Praise (= Muhammad) of the divine Names leads the gnostic to the Transcendence, Exaltedness (= 'Ali) over the opposites, and brings about the *unio mystica*, symbolized by the creative matrix which is Fatima ("the Creator").

The two different dimensions of the unitary divine light are joined as the single unifying Light who is Fatima. In the Lady of Light the two dimensions become one, intimating the mystery of the divine Unity. The *Afrad*, the solitary ones, the unitary ones, of Islamic mysticism and the *Gospel of Thomas*, are therefore those who have found the point of singularity known as Fatima, who in the Christian dispensation corresponds to the Virgin

² According to Najm Kobra, "heaven" esoterically coincides with the Holy Spirit; see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Tr. from the French by Nancy Pearson (New Lebanon, New York: Omega Publications / Shambhala Publications, 1994), 69-70; we in turn add that the Holy Spirit coincides with the Logos. We have heard Persian Muslims figuratively interpret the Qur'anic teaching that God created the heavens and the earth in Truth as referring to the creation of the Messengers in the divine Truth.

Mary. Finally, the realities of Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima issue forth into the dual dimension of Hasan and Husain, who are the Infallible Signs of God. Husain embraces the dimension of self-sacrificing martyrdom and of worship of God for no reward, purely out of gratefulness to God. The name Husain is a diminutive form of Hasan, the latter meaning "pleasant," "goodness," "handsome." Both brothers were martyrs, and this suggests that the two brothers represent total surrender and willingness for surrender in the cause of God, the One, and therefore of the mystical unity of the *Afrad*, the solitary ones. The sacred dimension of Husain is an emanation of Hasan, indicated by the derivation of the former name from the latter. The differentiation between the two is that Hasan's was an esoteric, hidden martyrdom, whereas the martyrdom of Husain was exoteric, public. Thus the pair implies that in this context the exoteric dimension is derived from the esoteric. And the emanation of the exoteric from the esoteric requires the mystical martyrdom of the alchemical *mortificatio*. The hidden celestial archetype undergoes a sort of death when crystallized onto the plane of manifestation in the world of forms, which implies limitation, finitude, and thus mortality. Consequently, a sacred equivalence is established between the pair of Muhammad and 'Ali as symbols of the exoteric and esoteric and the pair of Hasan and Husain as equivalent functional symbols of the exoteric and esoteric. A difference between the two pairs is that the first two embrace the hidden and revealed light of God, whereas Hasan and Husain represent primarily the witness and demonstration of the triadic luminal reality constituted by Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima.

The first 33 of the 99 Names of God pertain to the Muhammadan Paracletic dimension; the second set of 33 Names pertain to 'Ali's transcendent dimension; the final 33 Names pertain to the Fatiman unifying dimension. At the end of the invocation of the 99 Names, the 99 become the One, the Secret, Hidden Name of God, unrevealable because it is beyond the subject-object dichotomy, and thus beyond all language, for language is based upon, emerges from, and is bound to the limitative domains of time, space, subject, object, and thus by definition language cannot express the inexpressible. This void of Silence,

of inexpressibility, is reflected in the sacred exclamation: "I am dark but beautiful" (*Canticle of Canticles* 1:4). Unity is prior to multiplicity, and therefore in the *Gospel of Thomas* logion 107 the one sheep, that is, the hundredth sheep, is better than the ninety nine sheep; the latter correspond allegorically to the 99 divine Names; the one sheep better than all the others is the hidden Name of God, alluding to the Unity which is prior (qualitatively) to all multiplicity.

The Virgin Mary, like Fatima, represents the divine void. This void is alluded to in the Virgin Mary's fast of silence, of inexpressibility, as recorded in sura 19, an inexpressibility which issues forth into the revelation of the Logos, allegorically described as the Virgin bringing forth the Word. "I will by no means speak to anyone this day.' So she brought forth the child." The expressibility of this Word is a miraculous speaking, and thus the infant Jesus spoke in the cradle. His miraculous speech alludes to Jesus' status as the Word of God, the speech of God. Mary is the divine Silence who brings forth the divine Word. Therefore, when St. Ignatius of Antioch proclaims in chapter 19 of his *Letter to the Ephesians* that "the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing and likewise also the death of the Lord—three mysteries to be cried aloud—the which were wrought in the silence of God,"³ this apostolic author means that the sacred Virgin is the very matrix of divine Silence. She is the Silence of God, the *silentium Dei*, the "void" which cannot be spoken yet which gives birth to all Word and speech, for the mystery is "to be cried aloud." The Virgin Silence spoke, and the theophany of that speech was her child the Word, Jesus. Mary's conspicuous near-absence in the canonical Christian scriptures is but a neces-

³ Ignatius continues by writing that these three mysteries were made known to the ages, or aeons, by the star of Bethlehem. But what does the third mystery, that of Christ's death, have to do with the star of the nativity? The apostolic father explains that Christ's nativity brought the eternal life which abolished death. The sacred mystery of Christ's birth therefore proleptically encompasses the mystery of the "death of the Lord." For Islam, the death of Christ is an eschatological event associated with the approach of the end of the world. The latter perspective agrees with the witness of *4 Esdras* (*4 Ezra*) 7:28ff., a work held to be canonical by St. Basil, and quoted by St. Barnabas as inspired prophecy (see *Epistle of Barnabas* 12:1 which quotes *4 Ezra* 5:5).

sary result of her status as the divine Silence. That she becomes more prominent in the later Church is to be viewed as a preparation of the world for the Virgin's more preeminent status in the Qur'an and in Islamic theology and esoterism. The similarities between the Qur'anic accounts of Mary and Jesus and the New Testament Apocrypha are to be explained providentially in this way, and not by any theory of mere historical influence of apocryphal texts upon the Prophet of Islam. This Muslim amplification of the significance of Mary's person results from the Paracletic nature of Islam; the Paraclete manifests itself in feminine Wisdom mode as the Virgin Mary and in masculine Logos mode as Muhammad, who in his inner reality corresponds to the Sacred Father, the Tenth Intellect, which is but a refraction or reflection of the First Intellect, Nous, so that the Sacred Father connotes the Logos; the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali corresponds to the "Son," the "esoteric" Logos; Fatima corresponds to the Mother, the *Umm al-Kitab*, the Mother of the Book, the Holy Spirit.

24. Fatiman and Maryaman Dimensions of Sura *al-Qadr*

God sent down the plenary inliteration of the Word (*Amr*), the *Kitab*, on the Night of Majesty (*Qadr*). If the *Kitab* is sent down, that on which, or into which, it is sent down must be the *Umm*, the Mother of the Book. Thus the Night of Majesty may be called the Mother of Majesty, *Umm al-Qadr*. The *Umm al-Kitab*'s majestic status is celebrated in the *Book of Wisdom* 7:26: "For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness." The Night of Majesty is the Night of *glory*, which also precisely translates the Arabic word *Qadr*. On the night of Christ the Word's Nativity, the angels therefore sang "*Glory* to God in the highest"; and as the *Kitab* descended on the Night of Majesty, so the Spirit descended upon the Virgin Maryam as she conceived and then brought forth Jesus, the Word and Spirit of God.

When the celestial *Kitab* enters the plane of contingency, eternity pierces through the veils of temporality; time is thereby relativized, and consequently the Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months, both qualitatively and quantitatively, producing a sacred time dilation. *Psalms* 83 (84):11: "For better is one day in thy temple above thousands." Maryam dwelt in the Temple, for she is the Temple of the Lord, as she houses the very Word and Spirit of God, of which she herself is a plenary theophany in feminine modality. The *Kitab* descends upon the *Umm*, and therefore the night of descent exceeds a thousand months. On this night the angels descended and sang of God's majesty and glory, which is the night of the union of the Mother and the Word (Book). The *Umm al-Kitab* is ultimately a celestial manifestation, or emanation, of the Holy Spirit. At the Annunciation, the celestial masculine manifestation of the Spirit and the earthly human feminine manifestation of the Spirit meet as Gabriel and Maryam. These two theophanies of the Spirit meet

on account of their mysterious affinity, originating as they do from the same supernal matrix.

The angels and the Spirit descended with the *Amr*, the Word, in all its fullness. The *Kitab* is thus brought down in plenary mode on the Night of Majesty. The night is the *Umm al-Kitab*, and the Mother of the Book is salvation in its modality of peace (*Salam*), the peace of divine Silence, of sacred concealment. And this silence is the realm of the concealed archetypes; Islamic theosophy accordingly specifies that the *Umm al-Kitab* also denotes the realm of the archetypes. Silence reigns until the Word (Book) speaks, and the lunar *Umm* alternates with the solar *Kitab*. Yet because the *Kitab* issues forth from the Mother, she participates equally in the solar aspect. Therefore *Wisdom* 7:26 denominates Lady Wisdom as “the brightness of eternal light.”

Sura *al-Qadr* thus possesses multiple exegetical depths. The Spirit descends with the Qur’an in the Night of Majesty, the Night which is Fatima. Yet Maryam also represents a theophany of the Night, of the *Umm al-Kitab*. The sura’s Maryaman application suggests that Jesus, the Word and Spirit of God, entered into the night, into the *Umm*, who is Maryam as embodiment of the night, which is the *Silentium Dei*. Therefore, if according to Shi’ite gnosis, Fatima is the confluence of the lights of esoterism and exoterism, then so is Maryam the “singularity point” which embodies the “event horizon” where the silent, concealed Word of eternity is joined with the spoken words of God revealed in temporality.

25. Sura *Al-Kahf*: The Story of Al-Khidr and Moses

Moses said to his servant Joshua: “I will not stop till I reach the confluence of the two seas, or for years I will journey on” (sura 18:60). The two seas are exoteric and esoteric knowledge and wisdom; their confluence is Fatima, the Lady of Light, the Confluence of the Two Lights who are Muhammad and ‘Ali. The confluence results in the expansion of the divine light, hence the Qur’anic phrase from the celebrated Light Verse, “Light upon Light” (24:35). To arrive at the confluence requires a journey of many years, and therefore perseverance is vital in this odyssey of the soul’s journey (*suluk*). The ultimate destination is not esoteric knowledge, but rather the confluence of the exoteric and esoteric modes of wisdom, and this confluence is pure esoterism, which lies beyond all distinctions of knowledge, for it constitutes the very source of esoteric knowledge, along which contrastively stands exoteric knowledge, or the Law.

“But when they reached their confluence, they forgot their fish, and it took its way in the sea at will” (sura 18:61). At the banks, at the frontiers of esoterism, Moses and Joshua were not prepared, and the fish, symbol of esoteric knowledge, returned to the sea of pure esoterism from which it originally had come. Joshua forgot the fish at the rock where they had rested, and it miraculously escaped to the sea; miraculously, for the fish would have been presumably dead. Its going to the sea therefore suggests a resurrection from the dead. While resting at the rock of exoteric knowledge, esoteric knowledge escaped them and returned to its source. The rock, which is solid, contrasts with the fluidity of the water of gnosis. But solidity and fluidity are not absolute opposites, for Moses had once struck the rock and from it issued forth twelve streams of water for the twelve tribes of Israel. The rock thus stands for exoteric knowledge, the Law, which one must penetrate or even shatter in order to perceive

its esoteric essence.¹ Joshua failed to do this and the esoteric knowledge escaped him; it miraculously made its way to the sea of pure esoterism, the domain of the unseen, in contrast to the rock, representing the domain of the seen.

“It is this we were in quest of”; that is, the fish, which is esoteric knowledge. They retraced their steps, in order to find the fish again, but instead of finding the fish, they encounter al-Khidr, the embodiment of esoteric knowledge, therefore another manifestation or form of the self-same fish. Al-Khidr had received Mercy and Knowledge from God; he was in fact a manifestation, a theophany, of the esoteric knowledge of the Divine, emanating from the Mercy of God. The Mercy thus establishes a link with the confluence, which is Fatima and Maryam as manifestations of the *Umm al-Kitab*, *Rahma* and *rahm*, Mercy and Womb. The confluence of the sea is the Holy Spirit, whose manifestation is al-Khidr. Therefore in one sense, on a certain plane or level of being and manifestation, al-Khidr and Maryam “coincide.”²

Instead of following the fish, Moses wants to follow al-Khidr, for he recognizes al-Khidr as the embodiment of the esoteric knowledge he had been seeking in the fish. For this “following” one needs perseverance, patience; but to have patience, one must possess understanding, that is, the esoteric insight concealed beneath, or behind, the outward actions which the Master performs as various means of instruction, which urge the disciple to fix his gaze beyond the exoteric Law, into the vision of the hidden divine purposes and intentions. Only in this manner, only with this vision of the interior intent of the Law can a Master be equipped and fully competent to simplify

¹ The rock is a symbol of the seen, for it is fixed, like the Law, and thus plainly visible. The fish, in that it vanished from view represents the unseen. In that it is living, it is not fixed; it is moving, alive, for the Spirit blows where, and how, She wills. The fish escapes to the confluence of the two rivers of knowledge, the exoteric and esoteric rivers of insight. This demonstrates that esoteric Wisdom does not spurn or reject the exoteric, the Law.

² It is at the very least worthy of note that sura *al-Kahf*, which contains the account of al-Khidr, immediately precedes sura *Maryam*, for both *Sayyidatna* Maryam and *Sayyidna* al-Khidr “coincide” with the *Ruh*, albeit in varying modes.

certain matters of the outward Law for the sake of the realization of the inward. A few illustrative examples of such simplification include the Qur'an's proclamation that *dhikr* is better than prescribed prayers (29:45); that the true *qibla* is neither of the east nor of the west, but is an inward and righteous turning toward God (2:177); and that the best of clothing is obedience and sincerity before God (7:26).

Even though on the earthly plane Fatima is as daughter "sub-ordinate" to her father as to biological and temporal origin, and though she is the spouse of 'Ali on the same earthly plane, at the metaphysical level Fatima is the pure esoterism from which originate the Two Lights, the one being exoteric knowledge, the Prophet, and the second being esoteric knowledge, 'Ali; metaphysically considered, Muhammad therefore originates from Fatima. This is precisely why Shi'ite tradition calls Fatima "the Mother of her Father." Fatima is the *Umm* (Mother) from which the *Kitab* (Muhammad) originates. It must be stressed that al-Khidr in one sense does not represent pure esoterism as such; he represents esoteric wisdom and knowledge, as does 'Ali. Fatima is the sea of pure esoterism from which flow the two seas of the two kinds of knowledge, namely, the esoteric and exoteric modes of insight. Thus on the metaphysical plane, Fatima enjoys at one level an ontological priority in relation to her father and husband.

To recapitulate our reflections we will here present the following schema according to the paradigm of the *Ahlul Bayt*:

The Rock = Exoteric Knowledge/Wisdom = Muhammad as
Prophet

The Fish = Esoteric Knowledge/Wisdom = 'Ali as Imam of
the Prophet

The Sea = Esoterism as Such, Matrix of Wisdom, Wisdom as
Such = Fatima

In this arrangement, Fatima is the sea of esoterism, which is the source of the two kinds of knowledge represented by Muhammad and 'Ali. So from the angle of esoterism as such, Fatima is the Mother, the Source, the Matrix of her own father Muhammad.

As a final observation we record here that the sixth and eighth of the Holy Imams report that beneath the wall repaired by al-Khidr, tablets were discovered which contained esoteric wisdom. The following text of one of the tablets is given by the Holy Imams Jafar ibne Muhammad as-Sadiq and 'Ali ibne Musa ar-Reza:

In the Name of God the All Merciful, the All Compassionate.

There is no God save I (Myself).

I wonder at the man who is sure of death and yet rejoices.

I wonder at the man who knows that only the Will of the Lord is done and yet grieves.

I wonder at the man who knows the uncertainty of this world and yet covets for it.³

The three cases of "wonder" transparently correspond to the three tests al-Khidr imposed upon Moses as recounted in the Qur'anic narrative of their encounter.

³ *The Holy Qur'an*. Arabic Text, with English Translation and Commentary. With Special Notes from Ayatullah Agha Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya Yazdi. Translated by S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali. 4th ed. (NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 2004), 936. We have modified the translation.

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